The Dynamic of “Ordered Liberty:”
Forming United Church Worship Leaders in the Atlantic School of Theology Chapel

by

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and the Toronto School of Theology
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the formation of United Church of Canada (UCC) worship leaders in the Atlantic School of Theology (AST) chapel. As the United Church Formation Director at AST, the researcher is responsible for the Denominational Formation program (which includes opportunities for student-planned and -led worship) for UCC Master of Divinity students preparing for ordained ministry. The thesis begins with an investigation of the informal pedagogical space that is the theological school chapel. It then explores the character of United Church worship, introducing the UCC’s liturgical principle of “ordered liberty.” Next, the nature of formation for ministry is considered.

The qualitative research base of the thesis is a case study with three components: a questionnaire, interviews, and a focus group. Through these methods of data collection, recent alumni share stories of significant theological school worship experiences; the impact of their chapel worship experiences on their current worship leadership; the range of factors that influenced their learning; and recommendations for future AST students. Following analysis of the data collected in these ways, a “map” of the formation process is proposed as a learning tool. The multilayered tensions felt in planning and leading worship are explored. To conclude, the metaphor of chapel as playground is considered. The results of this study suggest improvements
for the content and process of forming United Church students for worship leadership in a theological school chapel.
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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Theological School Chapel Context

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the formation of students as worship leaders for The United Church of Canada (UCC) in the context of the chapel worship life at Atlantic School of Theology (AST). This research topic will first be examined through a multi-faceted theoretical framework constructed from the work of scholars in the fields of liturgical theology, Christian formation, adult education, and pneumatology. Central to this theoretical framework is the UCC’s liturgical principle of “ordered liberty,” a term that describes the denomination’s interest in maintaining both the forms of the past and the freedom to innovate. Through the vehicle of a qualitative research project, recent graduates will contribute their stories of theological school worship experiences; their understanding of the impact of those experiences on their current worship leadership; and their recommendations for future AST students.

I come to this research project as a lifetime member of and ordained minister in The United Church of Canada, and the current United Church Formation Director at Atlantic School of Theology. For a deeper understanding of the context from which this D.Min. research project originates, it is important to describe Atlantic School of Theology, the students with whom I work, and the UCC Formation program’s approach to chapel worship.

In this chapter, I offer a description of the context in which the study took place, as well as commentary on my own formation as a worship leader. I present preliminary remarks about metaphors for theological school chapel worship, and outline the learning processes in which

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1 The United Church of Canada, The Book of Common Order of the United Church of Canada (Toronto, ON: United Church Publishing House, 1932), iii. The concept of ordered liberty will be explored in Chapter 2.
students participate in the research setting. I conclude with brief remarks about the wider
Canadian context, and detailed notes about this study’s purpose, assumptions, and limitations.

1.2 Atlantic School of Theology

Atlantic School of Theology is a small seminary in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was founded
in 1971 with the joining together of Holy Heart (Roman Catholic) Seminary, the Anglican
seminary at King’s College (Halifax), and Pine Hill Divinity Hall (United Church of Canada).
Despite its location on the edge of the continent, AST trains a significant number of ordained
priests for two Anglican dioceses, Nova Scotia/Prince Edward Island and Fredericton, and
ordained ministers for The United Church of Canada. AST has a formal connection with
Maritime Conference and Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the UCC, but trains UCC
students from across Canada in its two M.Div. programs: the Summer Distance M.Div. program
and the residential M.Div. The Denominational Formation component of the residential M.Div.
program is the focus of this research study. AST also trains Roman Catholic laypeople for
congregational leadership in the Archdiocese of Halifax and Yarmouth. A small number of
people from other denominations study at AST for personal enrichment or ministry preparation
as well.

Because AST was designed as an inherently ecumenical learning institution, Wednesday
afternoons were set aside for the founding denominations (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and
United Church) to meet separately and to provide denomination-specific programming.
Formation Directors for the Anglican and Roman Catholic communities were appointed by their
curch bodies at that time. In the beginning, the UCC community elected a committee
composed of students, faculty, and local clergy to program their Wednesday gatherings.
However, at the request of the UCC students, the position of United Church Formation Director
was introduced in the 1980s. Formation Directors are recruited and paid by their denominational bodies, not by AST. It is also noteworthy that in the early years, students were required to participate in denominational formation activities as extra-curricular activities. Now one academic credit is granted for the successful completion of the three-year Denominational Formation program. Course requirements for United Church students include attendance, shared worship leadership, shared small group facilitation, and five written reflection papers. The Denominational Formation credit is not a requirement of the M.Div. degree, but it is a requirement for the granting of Testamur, the document that verifies that the student has completed the formal education required by the UCC for ordination.

The current practice of the UCC community at AST is to gather for a half-hour student-planned and student-led worship service starting at 1:00 p.m. each Wednesday afternoon. The group celebrates communion once a month. Every student is required to plan and lead worship in teams of two or three, normally twice or three times in one academic year. During the years that the participants in this study attended AST, the UCC Formation Group ranged from 14 to 26 students. After worship, the group moves to a classroom space either to explore topics of interest to the UCC or to meet in small groups for a monthly check-in and a shared spiritual practice.

Who attends the UCC Formation Group? Most of this group are candidates for ordained ministry in the UCC. A few are in the discernment process (seeking to confirm a vocation in ministry) or are considering entering discernment. The female to male ratio is typically three to one. Most of the UCC students are from Anglo-Celtic descent. A small number have African-Canadian heritage. The students come to study at AST from across Canada and Bermuda. (The Bermuda Synod of the Methodist Church is part of the UCC’s Maritime Conference.) Alberta,
Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland are the provinces most represented within our student body. Upper middle-class, middle-class, and working-class backgrounds are represented. About one-third of the group are 22-29 years of age. Most of the remainder range in age from 30 to 60, with an occasional student older than 60. The majority of students in the UCC Formation program consider themselves to be “cradle United Church,” but a significant number grew up in other denominations or discovered church as an adult.

My role as United Church Formation Director is to design and facilitate the activities of the Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation Group and to liaise with church judicatories concerning students’ preparation for ministry. Although I have been ordained since 1992, I am not currently serving a congregation. Neither am I a member of the AST Faculty. As the UCC Formation Director, I straddle the territories of church and academy, a “dual citizen” with one foot planted in each. It is my responsibility to give shape to the community ethos in which our students worship, and provide the framework in which students attend, plan, lead, and reflect on UCC worship in the AST chapel. Alongside many other people and programs that shape individuals for congregational leadership, I understand my work as “equip[ping] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

1.3 My Formation

As the researcher for this project, it is important to locate myself and my readers in relation to my own story of formation, as this impacts how I have understood and assessed the data I collected. I write this thesis as a woman who grew up in The United Church of Canada, “a
united and uniting church” with its blend of Reformed and Methodist traditions. My home congregation was founded in 1956, and so did not reflect the specific character of any of the UCC’s founding denominations – Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, or Local Union Churches. I am of Anglo-Celtic descent, my ancestors coming to southern Ontario from Scotland with Lord Selkirk in 1804. I earned an M.Div. degree at Emmanuel College in Toronto and was ordained in 1992. Since then I have served in congregational ministry in London, Saskatchewan, Toronto, Hamilton, and Maritime Conferences. I began my employment as the United Church Formation Director at AST in 2008.

My own context certainly shapes my assumptions and convictions about worship and worship leadership. William Kervin, in *Gathered for Worship*, suggests that we all have a “liturgy or liturgies of origin”\(^2\) that influence how we approach worship planning and change. I have two liturgies of origin: the first is worship in my home congregation, and the second is the worship services celebrated at our Presbytery summer church camp. My experiences of worship as a young person both in my home church and at summer camp have shaped me in such a way that I deeply value liturgy that is truly “the work of the people,” that celebrates God’s presence through scripture, prayer, music, visuals, and physical actions. As an M.Div. student at Emmanuel College in the early 1990s, I was informed and inspired by the work of David R. Newman and the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement in North America. As a United Church minister, I hold a deep appreciation for the liturgical traditions of the church and a desire to encourage new and fresh expressions for the church of today.

In my M.Div. training, participation in daily chapel was voluntary. Experimentation was welcomed without evaluation. My personal lack of experience in leading worship and feelings of fear prevented me from participating often in the planning and leading of chapel worship, but

regular attendance at chapel worship certainly shaped me as a worship leader. In every worship service I attend, I still say the ecumenical version of the Prayer that Jesus Taught that we learned at Emmanuel College. In addition to significant learning from my worship professors, working with acting and speech coaches in our worship course was also formative for me. Teaching Assistants and student colleagues were often informal conversation partners after especially confusing or challenging worship experiences. In addition, my summer ministry internships gave me significant opportunities to find my voice, develop patterns for worship preparation, and shape my style and identity as a worship presider.

1.4 AST Chapel as Playground or Minefield, Spiritual Practice or Laboratory

At the 2015 Societas Liturgica Congress in Quebec City I heard the space and experience of the theological school chapel described as both a “playground” by a doctoral student and a “minefield” by a seminary professor. It would be difficult to find two metaphors more in opposition to one another. In my eight years as UCC Formation Director, I have had many and varied experiences of chapel worship. One of the best sermons I have ever heard was delivered by a student in chapel. I also heard one sermon that was entirely plagiarized. Sometimes I leave worship feeling very inspired and uplifted. Occasionally I leave feeling disappointed or confused. Once I even felt insulted. I experienced worship as playground when I was invited to sit at a dining table the length of the sanctuary set for a dinner party and join in dinner table “conversation” that became the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving for the sacrament of communion.

I have also experienced the “minefield” of chapel worship. An example of experiencing chapel worship as minefield occurred one year at the final chapel service of the school term. The
service ended with Arcade Fire’s song, “Intervention,” offered as a commissioning. The song refers to working for the church three times:

   Working for the church while your family dies
   You take what they give you and you keep it inside
   Every spark of friendship and love will die without a home
   Hear the soldier groan, “We’ll go at it alone . . . .”

   Been working for the church while my family dies
   Your little baby sister’s gonna lose her mind
   Every spark of friendship and love will die without a home
   Hear the soldier groan, “We’ll go at it alone . . . .”

   Working for the church while your life falls apart
   Singing halleluiah with the fear in your heart
   Every spark of friendship and love will die without a home
   Hear the soldier groan, “We’ll go at it alone.”
   Hear the soldier groan, “We’ll go at it alone.”

I left that chapel service weighed down by the words: “Working for the church while your family dies . . . . every spark of friendship and love will die without a home. Hear the soldier groan, ‘We’ll go at it alone.’” I felt agitated and confused, battered and alone, and relieved that it was over. Throughout the day other worshippers confessed to me the distress they felt in worship that morning. I asked if they had given feedback to the worship team. They said that they hadn’t and didn’t plan to. It was the last day of class and everyone was busy packing up and getting ready to travel home.

   As I reflected on that experience throughout that day, many questions surfaced. Where was God in that worship experience, in the planning and the leading? How might it be worshipful to sing such a song? Is there such a thing as “good” and “bad” worship? What would make a UCC service “good?” And how might I engage AST students in conversations about their worship experiences that might facilitate their learning?

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When students submit their yearly evaluation forms for Wednesday Formation, their worship experiences are often described as meaningful and important to their spiritual life. Occasionally students will report that they do not “feel the spirit” in chapel worship. Some students welcome the responsibility of planning and leading worship as an opportunity to serve their community and hone their craft. Others consider it to be an extra burden on their week. Leading worship can be a source of significant stress and anxiety.

In my years as UCC Formation Director, I have noticed that faculty and students bring different and sometimes conflicting expectations to chapel worship. Some students expect chapel worship be like a research lab, where experimentation is encouraged, with the assumption that students will learn from their successes and failures. Others expect it to be an opportunity to showcase best practices for congregational worship which favours the “tried and true.” Some view chapel worship as purely a spiritual practice, an offering to be received with gratitude and never to be critiqued. The occasional student views worship as an extra assignment to be completed in the little extra time they have available. Faculty who work with student worship teams seem to take one of two approaches. Some work with their students, carefully crafting together high-quality worship experiences. Others release their students, giving them free rein to experiment.

My observations of the tensions within chapel worship at AST are consistent with those recorded in a collection of essays by professors and deans of chapels in US seminaries. This collection explores a wide range of metaphors for chapel worship, including chapel as laboratory, monastery, song circle, classroom, church, and mined territory. Following the lead

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See Siobhan Garrigan and Todd E. Johnson, eds., Common Worship in Theological Education (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). Throughout this paper I will use the terms “seminary” and “theological school” interchangeably. I am aware that there are differences, but at AST both frameworks are normally in play.
of Garrigan and Johnson’s book, this thesis will explore a variety of metaphors. This approach is well suited to a thesis on liturgy, since worship abounds with metaphor.

Metaphor is a helpful device to expand one’s understanding of a multi-dimensional truth. By placing two distinct images side by side, the more familiar of the two can help us toward greater understanding of the less familiar image by drawing attention to the similarities and differences. No one image is exhaustive of all meaning. However, metaphors reveal meaning and purpose in remarkable ways. There is simultaneously a rightness and wrongness in a metaphor. They have been described as names that are “inappropriate and yet they are inappropriate in the right direction. They are accurate misnaming.” For example, while The United Church of Canada claims that “God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description,” metaphors for God can help us to move in the right direction when articulating our understanding of God. A good metaphor can hold together the reality of the world and the reality of the Divine, enabling simultaneous participation in both. In addition to description or expansion of understanding, metaphors can “inflame the imagination,” articulate identity, provide a sense of direction, or offer an organizing motif. For these reasons, I will

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10 Newman, 281.

explore many metaphors in relation to chapel worship, presiding, and the process of formation for worship leadership throughout this thesis. The application of a variety of metaphors underscores the reality that worship, presiding, and formation are never just one thing.

Like playground and minefield, the metaphors introduced in the Garrigan-Johnson text reveal the inherent tensions or conflicts amongst the varied expectations for chapel worship that I have witnessed. For example, Evans assumes the metaphor of chapel as song circle, and argues that theological school chapel worship and leadership should be offered and received without critique:

[W]orship in seminary chapels is usually considered extra-, co-, or para-curricular. There are good reasons for this – student preachers offering homiletic reflections shouldn’t fear the red pens of homiletics professors jotting down flaws on the service leaflet any more than those professors should feel the need to critique instead of simply responding to the Word proclaimed.¹²

In contrast, Stamm advocates an approach that embraces the understanding of chapel worship as learning lab.¹³ In his opinion, theological schools are institutions of higher learning and as such should not only transfer knowledge, but create new knowledge and pioneer new ideas. When mistakes are lifted up and engaged, rather than glossed over or ignored, transformative learning takes place.¹⁴ Both of these approaches to chapel worship (song circle and learning lab) have merits.

Worship is pivotal to the life of the United Church community at AST and to the mission of a theological school, and as such it is a central spiritual practice for the UCC community at AST. Christians worship first and foremost simply because God is “worthy.” As Guardini

¹² Patrick Evans, “Musical Formation in Seminary Chapel Worship” in Garrigan and Johnson, 63.

¹³ Mark W. Stamm, “My Cup Runneth Over? Seminary Chapel as a Laboratory” in Garrigan and Johnson, 42-3.

¹⁴ Mary Hess, “Preface” in Garrigan and Johnson, xii.
writes, “When the liturgy is rightly regarded, it cannot be said to have a purpose because it does not exist for the sake of humanity, but for the sake of God. In the liturgy, man [sic] is no longer concerned with himself; his gaze is directed towards God.”

Daily worship at AST reminds us of our identity and purpose. However, Guardini admits that it is also true of the liturgy that “every action and every prayer which it contains is directed towards the providing of spiritual instruction.” Worship instructs. AST is indeed also a theological school with a mission to train people for congregational leadership. Worship in the theological school context “builds community and consolidates all the various aspects of the curriculum,” and as such is “vital to the proper functioning of the theological school,” according to Evans.

Therefore, although there is tension between the understanding of worship as laboratory, model church, and spiritual practice, all these metaphors need to be considered. To be sure, each worship service must be accepted as an offering, and the Holy Spirit can be trusted to encourage the spiritual life of the community and its members through communal worship. At the same time, students ought not to miss a valuable opportunity to reflect on their experiences and integrate their learning in their preparation for ministry. Whether or not a learning community intentionally reflects on worship practices, students are shaped by them. For example, when asked why a student did something in worship on her internship site, her reply was simply, “That’s how we do it at school.” For this student, the normative practices of the AST chapel formed her expectations of how worship ought to be conducted. Garrigan confirms that for

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16 Ibid., 40.
17 Evans, 63.
many theological school alumni/ae, chapel was a “privileged place as a pedagogical site” for their formation for ministry leadership.\textsuperscript{18}

Hess argues that the seminary chapel is the most “explicitly embodied and potentially integrative space of theological education” and its “most under-theorized and under-explored resource.”\textsuperscript{19} The approaches that I have taken during my time as Formation Director have been attempts to balance multiple understandings of chapel worship. I do so to recognize the value of worship for worship’s sake and to explore faithfully the rich resources that experiences of chapel worship provide for integrative theological education.

\textbf{1.5 Current Program Practices}

I return now to the specific context of chapel leadership at AST. Students currently plan and lead Wednesday afternoon worship in teams of two or three, twice or three times a year. I have taken two different approaches to help students learn from their experiences in planning and leading worship. My first approach was to set aside a period of time and a quiet space for the worship leaders to invite interested students into small, informal conversations about that day’s worship service. This time was presented as an opportunity to learn if what they had intended in their service was what the congregation experienced. However, I found that students rarely chose to take advantage of this opportunity. I thought that the same day was too soon for students to hear feedback on their worship. As a result, I designed a second approach. My second and current approach is a more formal process that includes receiving written feedback from two students, one faculty member, and me, which the student then incorporates

\textsuperscript{18} Siobhan Garrigan, “Crediting Chapel: Worship and the Theological Curriculum” in Garrigan and Johnson, 180.

\textsuperscript{19} Hess, ix.
into the following self-evaluative reflection.\textsuperscript{20} This reflection must be written by each student and submitted by the end of the term. The pedagogical aim of this process is for students to learn from fruitful reflection upon their own experiences and the feedback of others.

**Worship Personal Reflection Questions**

[Questions for the student worship leader before reading others’ feedback:]  
1. What was the theme of this worship service?  
2. What was the goal that you set for yourself in this worship service?  
3. How was this goal met in this worship service?  
4. What did you learn from the process of planning this worship service?  
5. What did you learn from the process of leading this worship service?  
6. What do you consider your strengths in worship planning and leadership?  
7. What areas do you feel need further attention?  

[Questions to consider after reading feedback forms:]  
8. What did you learn from the evaluations of your peers?  
9. What might be your goal for your next worship service?

Each student is responsible for undertaking this reflection process for one worship service each year. As a result, most students can simply participate in worship most weeks while still developing a practice of thoughtfully reflecting on worship planning and leadership. The qualitative research project component of the D.Min. program has afforded me an excellent opportunity to determine how successful this current reflection process is and how I might be

\textsuperscript{20} Please see Appendix A for the complete Worship Feedback Form that is utilized in this reflection process.
most helpful in encouraging students to mine the treasure trove of chapel worship experiences in their formation as worship leaders.

1.6 Wider Contexts

The AST chapel context of this study is centred within a circle of ever-widening contexts. The context of the UCC worship ethos will be explored in Chapter 2. Both the AST chapel and UCC worship are also situated within and influenced by the contemporary post-Christendom/postmodern culture in which Canadians live.\(^{21}\) While worshipping in a variety of local churches, I have witnessed several ways that post-Christendom/postmodern culture has influenced faith communities and the individuals who join together to worship in congregations and in the AST chapel.

Postmodernism’s hesitation about accepting the universality of truth has resulted in the acceptance of multiple realities and plural perspectives. This parallels UCC trends toward an increasingly inclusionary stance toward diversity and decreasing denominational loyalties. Diversity is highly valued, to the point that liturgical uniformity is often suspect or is rejected by UCC ministers and congregants. Note, for example, that the book of liturgies currently in use by United Church congregations is 776 pages, providing enormous variety without insisting on a standard approach.\(^{22}\) Values of pluralism and inclusivity have encouraged the addition of worship practices and music from around the globe and, in some cases, from other faith traditions. For example, a UCC congregation in Nova Scotia concludes its Sunday worship service with the Hindi greeting, “Namaste.” Weakening denominational loyalty can reduce the

\(^{21}\) The hallmarks of postmodernism listed in the following paragraphs are summarized in Friedrich L. Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 14-15.

motivation of ministers and congregants to create a recognizably “United Church” worship service. Technological advances such as copiers and projectors have also contributed to diversity in worship by facilitating the use of a wide range of resources. Digital technology creates even more significant challenges, “undoing boundaries, altering our sense of time and place.” Phyllis Airhart claims that “gathering in a building for worship at the same hour may someday seem as quaint to future generations as the notion of ‘Christendom’ now seems to us.”

The individualism and consumerism prevalent in contemporary Canadian culture also put pressure on United Church worship practice. Increasingly people are considered not citizens, but consumers who demand customization of the products they purchase. Anderson writes that some students expect that worship will express “my” faith, and that worship will be measured by what I “get” out of the service.

These contemporary cultural influences affect current worship practices to the extent that scholars and ministers alike are forced to explore anew questions about the meaning and purpose of worship, and the values for worship that the UCC has upheld over many decades.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

My motivations for undertaking this research arise out of the two worlds I inhabit: the church and the seminary. Karl Barth once said, “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” I would assert that

23 Phyllis Airhart, “‘Do we still believe that something vital is in the making?’: The United Church of Canada at 90,” The United Church Observer (June 2015): 31.

24 Ibid., 31.


worship is the “living centre” around which both the UCC congregation and AST orbits. As Kervin claims, we are “in an age where liturgical traditions are under significant pressure to respond to changing contexts.” AST is entrusted with helping to shape students as capable worship leaders for the present and future church. Over the course of their M.Div. studies, students are trained both in the classroom and in congregational settings. In addition to daily ecumenical prayer services, UCC students attend up to seventy-two UCC worship services during their degree program as a central component of their Wednesday Formation program, and plan and lead between nine and twelve of those services. Significant time and effort is dedicated to attending, planning and leading worship. Yet little attention has been paid to chapel worship, especially as a pedagogical site. Given this lack of attention, I chose to make chapel worship leadership the focus of my research.

It is the purpose of this thesis to discover and explore the lived experiences of theological students as they attend, plan, lead, and reflect on worship in the theological school chapel; how these experiences shape or form them as worship leaders; what issues impact their formation; what strategies are employed by the participants in the process and to what effect; and what might be learned from this inquiry to foster the formation of theological students as worship leaders. The central research question is:

**In what ways have students’ experiences in AST chapel worship contributed to their formation as worship leaders within The United Church of Canada?**

It is my hope that this study will contribute to future conversations about processes of formation with students and faculty at AST, resulting in a more effective learning community

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27 Peter Brunner, “Divine Service in the Church” in Vogel, 204.

overall; and that new learnings from the study will make a positive contribution to chapel worship at AST, enriching the community’s worship life as well as strengthening students’ knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality as worship leaders. This study may also be of value to the faculty and staff responsible for chapel worship in other theological schools. Adding stories from the perspective of theological students’ experience, especially in the Canadian context, to the scholarship on formation for ministry and theological school chapel worship could also strengthen these fields of academic inquiry.

Ultimately, I hope that this study may positively contribute to the formation of exemplary worship leaders for The United Church of Canada. Worship leaders who are imaginative, creative, and nimble in their worship planning, open to exploring new ways of worshipping, and able to “shift [worship practices] as the world around us shifts” are needed for the church of today and tomorrow. 29 The church also needs worship leaders who will not thoughtlessly adopt the latest fad, and who will not include a component in a service simply because they “like it,” but will create thoughtfully rooted transformational worship practices that connect people to God, to one another, and connect the needs of the world with God’s desires for the world.

To come to a deeper understanding of formation for worship leadership in the AST chapel, several themes must be explored. We have already explored the range of expectations for chapel worship at AST. In Chapter 2 we explore theological understandings of worship in general and the ethos of UCC worship in particular, as well as the role of the presider. Chapter 3 focuses on the meaning of formation for ministry, the process of formation as ordered liberty, and the actions of the Holy Spirit in worship and learning. In Chapter 4, the case study (a qualitative research project conducted with recent AST alumni/ae) is introduced in detail.

29 Hess, x.
Chapters 5 through 7 present the results of the three case study components: a questionnaire, interviews, and a focus group. Dominant themes that emerge from the study data will be assessed further in Chapter 8 and future directions considered in the final chapter.

1.8 Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

I bring assumptions to my study of formation through participation in chapel worship that both arise from and inform the theoretical foundation outlined above. First, I assume that students are shaped or formed *somehow* by their participation in chapel worship, in either big or small ways, consciously or unconsciously. I assume that students have a wide variety of experiences during their years of study, both positive and negative, and that their experiences are influenced by a variety of factors including (but not limited to) personal factors (e.g. comfort in giving and receiving feedback); relational factors (e.g. respecting and trusting the person that is sharing feedback); and organizational factors (e.g. how feedback sharing opportunities are structured). I assume that one of these factors of influence is the varying, and sometimes conflicting, expectations of seminary chapel worship. Throughout the study, I maintain that chapel worship is an ideal setting in which to form students as worship leaders, since it is an opportunity for students to acquire knowledge, practice skills, grow into their pastoral identities, strengthen their personal spiritualities, to integrate theory and action, and to “think deeply about it all.”

It is good stewardship of the learning site to take full advantage of every teachable moment that presents itself. Finally, it is my assumption that the Holy Spirit works within and through and between the students, staff, and faculty to bring about growth and transformation.

Although it is anticipated that the findings will be applicable to current United Church students at AST, this study may be limited in its applicability to other theological school

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contexts as each school has its own practices for student participation in chapel worship. A second potential limitation is my role in the program that is under evaluation, since I relate so closely to the program. This limitation is addressed in the research methodology described in chapter 4. Also, in terms of research protocol, five interviews may be considered a small number on which to base significant claims. However, I am convinced that saturation of data was achieved in the questionnaires. Care was taken to make sure that the breadth of responses in the questionnaires was represented in the choosing of the interviewees and the focus group members. Care will also have to be taken in making claims concerning causal factors for formation for worship leadership. Although claims of association can certainly be made, claims of cause must be tentatively asserted.31

1.9 Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the formation of UCC worship leaders in context of the theological school chapel. I approach this project as an ordained UCC minister and the current United Church Formation Director at AST. The theological school chapel is a rich and complex context as evidenced by the varied expectations participants bring with them into their chapel experiences. Chapel worship is expected to be simultaneously an inspiring spiritual practice and an experimental learning lab, which results in chapel worship being experienced as both a playground and a minefield. My current educational practices attempt to embrace both approaches, allowing students to simply worship much of the time, while providing formal opportunities to reflect on worship in meaningful ways in order to encourage their growth as worship leaders. Broader contexts of UCC worship and contemporary Canadian society also influence current trends in UCC worship toward increasing diversity, inclusivity, technological

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innovation, and customization, putting pressure on UCC worship leaders to revisit the meaning and purpose of worship itself and to make changes that respond in faithful and engaging ways to changing contexts.

In order to accomplish the purpose before us, the thesis will continue to build on the AST context to construct a multi-faceted theoretical framework in which to situate the shared experiences of recent AST alumni/ae. This framework will include scholarly works on theological understandings of worship, the ethos of United Church worship, the role of presider, the process of formation for ministry, and the work of the Holy Spirit in both worship and formation. The intention of this researcher is the strengthening of the educational experiences of future students at AST, and the strengthening of the worship lives of the congregations with whom our students will minister.
Chapter 2

United Church Worship: Ordered Liberty

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the dynamics of worship as a human and theological activity, first by correlating The United Church of Canada’s theological understandings with five worship emphases proposed by Ruth Duck, then exploring ordered liberty as the UCC’s key liturgical idiom as expressed in several generations of the denomination’s worship resources. Next, I review Charlotte Caron’s eight principles for just worship as a way of further understanding the ethos of worship within the United Church, and conclude with a brief reflection on worship as play and as risk-taking.

2.2 Duck’s Five Theological Emphases in Understanding Worship

The Nairobi Statement of the Lutheran World Federation (1996) asserts that worship is the “heart and pulse of the church,” central to both belief and practice and the intersection of the two. Liturgy is our primary theology, using words and signs to speak of and to God. The Latin motto lex orandi, lex credendi is a pivotal concept in the field of liturgical theology meaning “the rule for praying is the rule for believing” (and vice versa). Therefore, what is said and done in worship matters, and the manner of presiding over what is said and done in worship also matters. The worship leader creates bridges so that the community can do more than talk about God: it can encounter the Holy, hear God’s call, respond with thanks and praise, commune with the Divine, follow in God’s way, and co-create God’s vision of Shalom. A study of United Church worship necessarily begins with a broader inquiry into worship in general and its

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33 Ibid., 102. While the precise meaning of this expression is subject to ongoing debate, it endures as a pivotal concept within liturgical theology.
significance. To accomplish this, I will correlate Ruth Duck’s five categories for the meaning of worship with the UCC’s theological self-understanding. Duck’s ethos in the liberal United Church of Christ is compatible with that of the UCC.

The United Church of Canada’s 2006 faith statement, “A Song of Faith,” “sings” of worship in this way: “We offer worship as an outpouring of gratitude and awe and a practice of opening ourselves to God’s still, small voice, to God’s rushing whirlwind of challenge. Through word, music, art, and sacrament, in community and in solitude, God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world. We sing with trust.”\(^{34}\) This short statement exhibits Duck’s “five theological emphases in understanding worship” which are ritual, revelation, response, relationship, and rehearsal.\(^{35}\) All are present in most Christian liturgies, although one or more may receive more emphasis than others in a particular Christian tradition. Duck’s first emphasis is ritual. Anderson and Foley define ritual as “ordered, patterned, and shared behaviour, but more than that, it is an imaginative and interpretive act through which we express and create meaning in our lives.”\(^{36}\) The repeated songs, prayers and actions that comprise the ritual dimension of Christian worship create communal identity, express self-understanding, and help people move through life’s passages and crises, giving meaning to life experiences.

Duck’s second theological emphasis is worship as revelation. According to this understanding of worship, God is present and acting in worship and is revealed through activities such as the reading and interpretation of scripture, and the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. This understanding is echoed in the opening words of The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

\(^{34}\) The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 8.
Canada’s “New Creed.” There the worshipping community reads that “God is with us. We are not alone.”37 As Duck puts it, “God, Source, Word, and Spirit, is among us to welcome, teach, encourage, feed, and commission those who worship in the name of Jesus.”38 Jean-Jacques von Allmen, a French Reformed theologian, wrote that worship is an instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to carry on God’s work of “rendering efficacious today the past work of Christ.”39 The work of Christ—which is the “whole history of salvation, past, present and future, culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ”—is for Christians an “inexhaustible source of joyful thanksgiving.”40

The next of Duck’s categories is worship as response. This is articulated in the “Song of Faith” in the denomination’s conviction that “Our first response to God’s providence is gratitude. We sing thanksgiving.”41 Worship is understood as a response of reverence, thanks and praise for what “God has done, is doing, and will do.”42 In response to the question, “What does worship do?” Caron asserts that worship gathers the faithful, calls them to encounter God, intends to create awe, proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ, connects worshippers with the historic and universal church, is an equalizer, signifies self-giving, unites the transcendent and the immanent, extends pastoral care, educates, maintains discipline and good order, and


38 Duck, 10.


40 Ibid., 131.

41 The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

42 Duck, 11.
ritualizes certain passages of life. But primarily, worship gives God praise. As Duck elaborates, the affirmation of human responsiveness in and through worship points toward the freedom to innovate. “If worship is response to God,” she argues, “then our contemporary expressions of faith and praise are not only permitted but, indeed, necessary.” However, this freedom to innovate requires a posture of humility, recognizing the limits of our human words and actions.

Worship as relationship, Duck’s fourth category, brings together God’s revelation in worship and our human response. It is an understanding of a “mutual giving and receiving” relationship with God. In the vernacular of the UCC, “In and with God, we can direct our lives toward right relationship with each other and with God. . . . We sing lament and repentance. . . . We sing of grace.” Worship as relationship reveals God’s love and draws us to respond in kind by loving God, one another, the earth itself. Duck’s emphasis points to the concrete elements of the worship encounter that express and develop relationship: “Scripture, sermon, sacrament, and song reveal God relationally, not mechanically through correct words and actions.” Understanding Christian worship as relationship is an understanding favoured by Methodists, given that “Wesley emphasized both divine grace in the sacraments and the need for human response.” The UCC, a denominational descendent of Methodism, understands baptism in

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44 Duck, 11-12.

45 Ibid., 16.

46 The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

47 Duck, 12.

48 Ibid., 13.
precisely the same way. In the words of the “Song of Faith,” baptism is seen to reveal “the nurturing, sustaining, and transforming power of God’s love and our grateful response to that grace.”

However, worship as relationship is not merely about one’s individual relationship with God, for “[a] relational theology of worship holds together the conviction that God is truly present, revealing Godself in worship, and the conviction that worship is not complete without the church’s response in faith and love.”

Duck’s fifth category of worship as rehearsal connects worship with the life of the world. Drawing on the work of John Burkhart, Duck defines rehearsal as “worship as a way of practicing love, justice, and peace in preparation for life in the world. . . . Worship is rehearsal when the gathered church is changed and prepared to take its part in God’s drama of transforming life in this world.” This fifth theological category is crucial to understanding the ethos of UCC worship. Caron begins Eager for Worship with these words: “Worship makes us the church. It brings us into God’s presence. Together we listen for God’s Word. We are nurtured and challenged by that Word so that, in unity with other Christian people, we can go into the world dedicated to living in the ways of God and service of humanity.” For Caron, worship enables visions of new, more just realities and provides opportunities to participate in the unfolding of the kin-dom of God, God’s will fulfilled on earth as in heaven. This understanding of worship is not rehearsal in the sense of practicing for a future event that will “count,” but rehearsal in the sense of “practice which forms patterns that endure beyond the

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49 The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

50 Duck, 13.

51 Ibid., 14.

52 Caron, 1.

53 Ibid., 1.
time of gathering.”54 Within “A Song of Faith” one finds United Church convictions about the sacrament of communion that illustrate this understanding of worship as rehearsal:

Invited to the table where none shall go hungry, we gather as Christ’s guests and friends. In holy communion we are commissioned to feed as we have been fed, forgive as we gave been forgiven, love as we are loved. The open table speaks of the shining promise of barriers broken and creation healed. In the communion meal, wine poured out and bread broken, we remember Jesus. We remember not only the promise but also the price that he paid for who he was, for what he did and said, and for the world’s brokenness. We taste the mystery of God’s great love for us, and are renewed in faith and hope.55

Further examples of United Church practices that express an understanding of worship as rehearsal include the use of inclusive language for humanity, expansive language for God, hospitality, accessibility, and commissioning congregants through the liturgy to be signs of God’s peace, love and justice in the world once the liturgy has concluded.56

In summary, Duck has identified five theological emphases that are evident in robust Christian worship services. Christian worship consists of ritual actions that provide a sense of common identity and meaning among the congregants. God is present and active in worship revealing Godself to God’s people and enacting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Worship is also a human response of thanks and praise for all that God has done, is doing and will do. Worship as relationship holds together the convictions that God is revealed in worship and that worship is not complete without the church’s faithful response to God’s loving action. Finally, worship is a rehearsal in that it practices love, justice, and peace as a means of preparing worshippers to enact love, justice, and peace in the world. These five theological emphases provide a helpful framework for reporting (within this thesis) on study participants’ understandings of the

54 Duck, 15.

55 The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

56 Duck, 15.
meaning and purpose of worship, as we will explore in Chapter 5. Having established this broad framework, let us now narrow our attention to distinctively UCC worship values.

2.3 Ordered Liberty

In Chapter 1, I asserted that worship is under pressure to change in many UCC congregations today. In what other ways might UCC worship be distinctive at this juncture in time? Two UCC scholars, William Kervin and Charlotte Caron, provide helpful historical and theological constructs for a deeper understanding of UCC worship.

The term that best describes The United Church of Canada’s worship tradition comes from the preface of the 1932 Book of Common Order:

In the churches which united to form The United Church of Canada there was an ordered liberty of common worship. They followed lines marked out by the Apostolic practice and hallowed by the general usage of Christendom, but they shrank from a uniformity that might quench the Spirit of God in the soul of [humanity]. In our worship we are rightly concerned for two things: first, that a worshipping congregation of the Lord’s people shall be free to follow the leading of the Spirit of Christ in their midst; and secondly, that the experience of many ages of devotion shall not be lost, but preserved, experience that has caused certain forms of prayers to glow with light and power.57

This passage highlights an enduring interest in the denomination both to maintain the forms of the past and to offer the freedom to innovate. Since its formation in 1925, the UCC has had five volumes of orders for worship for “voluntary use.”58 Each succeeding volume has grown in size. The most recent is the 776-page Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada.59 Published in 2000, it is the United Church’s first postmodern liturgical resource, “an attempt at ordered liberty for the turn of the millennium.”60 The inclusion of a

57 The United Church of Canada, Common Order, iii.


59 The United Church of Canada, Celebrate.

great diversity of liturgical materials in this resource accords with the claim in “A Song of Faith” that “[t]he Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy not only in what is familiar, but also in that which seems foreign.”

The dynamic of “ordered liberty” is key to understanding both UCC worship and formation for ministry, and as such is the organizing principle of this study. Kervin asserts that the dynamic of order and liberty is present throughout all the generations of United Church worship resources. “In every generation,” he writes, “order and liberty, catholicity and particularity, continue to inform and shape each other in ongoing interaction in the creation of something new, yet something still connected to the familiar.”

What are the origins of this ongoing dialectic, the dynamic process of ordered liberty? How is this organizing concept understood throughout the UCC’s history? Although the whole of the history of worship in the United Church is not contained within its five “generations” of worship publications, a glimpse at each of them reveals significant aspects of UCC liturgy.

Published the year after the inauguration of The United Church of Canada, the denomination’s first service book was *Forms of Service* (1926), a compilation of 21 liturgies drawn from the founding denominations with small changes to reflect the theology and polity of the new denomination. Thirteen of the forms were from the Presbyterian tradition, four were from the Methodist tradition, and four were from the Congregationalist tradition. No order for a Sunday liturgy was included in this resource as it was considered to be beyond the editors’

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61 The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”


mandate.\textsuperscript{64} These liturgies were intended for “voluntary use,” a perspective that has remained consistent in each generation of worship resources.\textsuperscript{65}

In 1930, \textit{The Hymnary} was published, and a second book of services was published in 1932. \textit{The Book of Common Order of The United Church of Canada} chose an approach of common \textit{order} rather than common \textit{prayer}. It introduced the concept of ordered liberty, the balancing of tradition and freedom to innovate. The first order for Sunday worship, a blend of the Anglican service of morning prayer developed in England and the Presbyterian Westminster Directory (with the sermon at the climax of the service), became the normative order of service across the denomination.\textsuperscript{66}

The next liturgical resource was published in 1969. It consisted of two volumes, a service book for the use of worship leaders and a service book for the use of the people.\textsuperscript{67} The 1969 service book upheld the principle of ordered liberty: “As our forefathers did in 1932, ‘the committee prays that those who use this book may be enabled to enter more fully into the rich heritage of Christian worship’ and be stimulated to explore, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, new ways of worship.”\textsuperscript{68} These service books are responsible for the shift to an Approach-Word-Response order of service, asserting the sacrament of communion as “normative” for Christian worship.\textsuperscript{69} As the editors noted, “Throughout most of the history of

\textsuperscript{64} United Church of Canada, \textit{Forms of Service for the Offices of the Church} (Toronto, ON: The United Church Publishing House, 1926), ix.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., v.

\textsuperscript{66} Kervin, “Worship on the Way,” 186.


\textsuperscript{68} The United Church of Canada, \textit{Service Book for the use of ministers}, iii.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., v.
the Christian church a basic principle has governed the structure of public worship. The principle is simply that sermon and supper belong together as the full diet of public worship. Where it is not possible to celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week, the principle, nonetheless, governs the structure.”\textsuperscript{70} The editors make no recommendations concerning the frequency of celebration of the Eucharist, but do note the weekly celebration of communion in the ancient church.

The 1969 \textit{Service Books} also embraced emerging liturgical trends. The passing of the peace, the presentation of the communion bread and wine during the offertory, the commissioning, and the inclusion of concrete situations in pastoral prayers were all ways that an understanding of worship as action were introduced in the liturgies. By incorporating increased congregational participation, the corporate aspect of public worship was embraced. These service books advocated as much participation of the whole community as possible, in prayers, hymns, psalms, the reading of scripture, leading in prayer, offering spaces of silence for personal prayers, and including requests for specific thanksgivings and intercessions. These service books also incorporated increased use of vernacular language (such as replacing “thee” and “thy” with “you” and “your”). The vernacular was considered to promote “a greater sense of incarnation, immanence, intimacy, and immediacy in worship.”\textsuperscript{71} The service books also introduced a lectionary influenced by the UCC’s Sunday School resources, \textit{The New Curriculum}.\textsuperscript{72} The contemporary orders of service in this service book were the most widely

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., 76.

\textsuperscript{71} Kervin, “Worship on the Way,” 195.

used by congregations. The companion hymnal to these service books was *The Hymn Book*, published two years later. A joint United Church-Anglican project, this music resource was designed for a future UCC-ACC denominational union that never came to fruition.

The ecumenical liturgical movement that rose out of Vatican II greatly influenced the shaping of the next generation of liturgical resources, a series of five liturgies that were published from 1984 to 1986. Liturgical materials for Sunday mornings, baptisms, weddings, and funerals, together with resources for pastoral occasions, were once again designated for “optional use.” Each was rooted in the norm of the Lord’s Supper as the basic Christian service and followed the format of a Service of the Word followed by a Service of the Table. The word “Eucharist” was introduced with its accompanying understanding of the sacrament of communion as primarily thanksgiving, “express[ing] the thankful and joyful note that characterized early Christian worship but was subsequently lost.” This resource encouraged more frequent celebration of communion. As a result, many congregations moved from celebrating communion four times a year to celebrating once a month. Also characteristic of this period was the introduction of the practice of serving communion to children rather than waiting until a child confirmed their baptismal vows. The influence of the ecumenical *Whole People of God* Sunday School curriculum was also felt in this period. Intergenerational worship, the celebration of the liturgical seasons, and the use of the Revised Common Lectionary were all championed by this grassroots curriculum. 1987 marked the publication of a small hymn book,

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74 *The Hymn Book of the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada* (Canada: Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada, 1971.)


76 The Whole People of God curriculum was originally a project of the Regina Presbytery of the UCC. *Whole People of God* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1987-2002.)
Songs for a Gospel People, a supplement to The Hymn Book that showcased new hymnody and informal worship songs.77

The publication of Voices United in 1996 initiated the most recent generation of liturgical resources.78 Compilers of this hymn book sought to include texts and tunes that represented a variety of classic and contemporary hymns (including the reintroduction of beloved hymns not included in The Hymn Book), a greater breadth of theological understandings, inclusive language, and global tunes and texts, all indexed for the liturgical calendar and the Revised Common Lectionary. The collection of responsive psalms with sung responses is a particular strength of this collection.

The inclusion of increasing diversity continued and expanded in Celebrate God’s Presence, the newest book of services.79 The Eucharistic prayers alone span the full Christian historical trajectory from the earliest available second-century prayer of Hippolytus, to feminist sources, to a guide for extemporaneous prayer. This collection takes its title from a line within “A New Creed,” the UCC’s 1968 faith statement: “We are called to be church: to celebrate God’s presence . . . .” These liturgical themes are continued in the hymnal supplement, More Voices (2007), the most recent of the UCC’s worship resources, which also offers diverse styles and theologies, as well as newer Canadian and global songs.80


78 Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of The United Church of Canada (Toronto, ON: The United Church Publishing House, 1996)

79 The United Church of Canada, Celebrate.

80 More Voices: Supplement to Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of The United Church of Canada (Toronto, ON: United Church Publishing House, 2007.)
A significant liturgical resource that has been a staple of many ministers over the last two liturgical generations is *Gathering*. Originally published as *Getting It Together*, and continuing as *Gathering* from 1983, this grassroots resource is published three times a year. It offers lectionary-based suggestions for music, prayers, and preaching by United Church people for United Church people.

In all of these resources, over the course of eight decades, the characteristic approach of “ordered liberty” has been at work, “though manifestly different in each one.” Kervin utilizes the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur to describe the dynamic nature of the dialectic of ordered liberty: “[T]his is not simply a two-dimensional tug-of-war. It is a complex, three-dimensional evolutionary process, a kind of liturgical hermeneutical spiral twisting through successive passages of liturgical ordering and contextualization.” Nor is it a matter of a pendulum swinging between opposing forces. Two magnetic poles – order and liberty – are operative in each dialectical moment, held in creative tension in a way that neither is eliminated or resolved. As Zimmerman argues, “[I]t is precisely the creative tension that is [the] ‘synthesis,’ a creative tension that produces something new.” The process of interaction between order and liberty allows each to “inform and shape” the other to “create something new that is still connected to something familiar.” For Kervin, good United Church worship holds the following in dialectical relationship: “order and liberty, form and freedom, catholicity and particularity,

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83 Ibid., 196.


ecumenism and denominationalism, scholarship and reception, expert advice and popular opinion, continuity and change, tradition and innovation.” Additional factors to be kept in dialogue include heart and head, intellect and emotion, traditional and contemporary, formal and informal, and high and low. “When the interplay is lost,” writes Kervin, “the dynamic dialectic that is at the heart of United Church worship is threatened and the result lacks liturgical integrity.”

Ordered liberty is a key principle that describes United Church worship over the course of its history. It is best understood as a dynamic dialectic that holds in tension UCC concerns for freedom to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the congregation’s midst; and preserve the experience of many ages of devotion that has caused certain forms of worship “to glow with light and power.” To this key principle we now add Caron’s principles for “just” worship in the UCC.

**2.4 Caron’s Eight Principles for Just Worship**

To deepen the analysis of the ethos of United Church worship as ordered liberty, we next consider Caron’s prescriptive list of theological principles that, when applied, assist in making United Church worship practices just. These principles are certainly not specific to the UCC but do express and correlate well with what the UCC especially values in its worship life. The first of these principles is mission. As A Sunday Liturgy states: “Worship and mission belong together.” For Caron, the church gathers for worship in order to be strengthened, empowered,

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87 Ibid., 333.

88 The United Church of Canada, *Common Order*, iii.

89 Working Unit on Worship and Liturgy, 5.
and renewed to “be God’s hands and feet in the world.”\textsuperscript{90} Worship accomplishes this when it includes accurate information about the world and its needs, meaningful analysis of social structures, and clear direction about actions needed to meet the concrete needs of the world’s people. Worship should create visions of a just society that “will allow us to believe and act into a new way of being,”\textsuperscript{91} and will call worshippers to global justice, more equitable sharing of the world’s resources, and the ending of violence.

Caron’s second principle for just worship is the construction of community. As she notes, “Ideally Christian communities empower us to know ourselves as beloved – beloved of God and loved by the people of God.”\textsuperscript{92} Worship builds community by welcoming attendees, introducing codes and customs, offering physical accessibility and comfort, modelling language of respect and solidarity, and employing “we” language instead of “me” language. Worship that connects with pastoral care concerns and the life experiences of the people who have gathered also builds community.

Inclusion of diversity is Caron’s third principle. She argues that “A theology of diversity stresses that we are all created in image of God, that we are interrelated and responsible for making sure everyone has a place in the circle.”\textsuperscript{93} Worship is made more inclusive by means of attention to how and where people move in worship; how prayer refers to “us” rather than “them;” how inclusive language is used for humanity; and the use of a variety of images for God.

\textsuperscript{90} Caron, 130.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 131.
Caron’s next principle is participation. It is important to her that the planning and leading of worship should include input from all the people who attend.\textsuperscript{94} For example, worship ought to be shaped out of the concerns of the people, and careful attention ought to be paid to the shared leadership of liturgy and the sense of safety required for full participation.

Truth-telling is Caron’s fifth principle. She advocates for preferential attention to the “truth known by those who have not had power in society and who have not been invited to share their insights” because truth-telling in worship “gives ritual validation to the experiences of those who have been marginalized and pushes us to acknowledge the sins of the church. . . . to engage in repentance, and to commit ourselves to actions for justice”\textsuperscript{95} Sharing stories of the residential school experiences of First Nations people is a good example of truth-telling in worship. Likewise, the introduction of rituals that tell the truth about real human lives, such as rituals for miscarriages, ends of relationships, and so on point toward truth-telling within the context of worship.

Caron’s sixth principle is survival. Worship that is just should reflect human responsibility for the survival of peoples and the planet. As she remarks,

Liturgies that model options for peace, wholeness, and justice are needed if survival becomes central to our theology. . . . We need to ask, does this liturgy give power and imagination to the church as a group and help people build structures for change? Does it help to raise our children to be just and caring people? Does it eliminate sexism, racism, homophobia, family fixation, classism, ageism, productivity, or able body-centred biases? Does it care for the environment? Does it invite participants to be accountable in our actions and choices?\textsuperscript{96}

Caron’s seventh principle, compassion, flows out of the sixth. She defines compassion as the “capacity to be present to one another and to work tenaciously for one another’s well-

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 132.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 132, 135.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 133.
being.”\(^{97}\) To be compassionate in worship, human beings need silence to listen to the Spirit and to one another; announcements need to be presented as invitations to join in the work of the people of God; and heads, hearts, senses, bodies, and feelings need to be fully engaged so that, empowered by the Spirit, worshippers will go into the world to act justly and offer compassion to a broken world.

Caron’s eighth and final principle for just worship is the creation of healthy self-esteem. In her words, “People need to understand in every fibre of our beings that we are made in image of God and loved by God.”\(^{98}\) Healthy self-esteem allows worshippers to be fully present to each other and considerate of each other’s well-being. It empowers congregants to name their needs while respecting the needs of others and of the community. For Caron, the impact of this spiritual principle is de-emphasizing sin (within the liturgy and within sermons), and greater emphasis on being God’s beloved.\(^{99}\) She argues that, “Although repentance is an appropriate Christian discipline, to focus our energy on confession disempowers us and consumes energy we need for positive action in the world.”\(^{100}\)

Caron advocates for the consideration of these eight principles when planning UCC worship. For her, just worship emphasizes mission, construction of community, inclusion of diversity, participation, truth-telling, survival of peoples and planet, compassion, and creation of healthy self-esteem. These principles, in addition to the principle of ordered liberty, will become the organizing principles for reporting on the understandings of UCC worship held by study participants within this thesis.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 134.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 134.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 134.
2.5 Worship as Play and Risk

Before we leave our exploration of worship and turn our attention in the next chapters toward the process of formation for ministry and worship leadership, we will take a brief look at the understanding of worship as play and as risk-taking. Both will be helpful as we consider the results of the research study in chapters 5 through 8 and further explore the metaphors of theological school chapel as playground and minefield.

Liturgical scholar Romano Guardini explores worship as play in his 1930 text, “The Playfulness of the Liturgy.”101 Anthropologists have long categorized ritual, worship, and play together.102 For Guardini, worship is play in the sense that the liturgy creates a world of “open fields and woods” in which the soul can explore and develop.103 Worship, like play, happens for its own sake. It has no agenda or purpose other than itself. The child at play does not want to do anything but to exercise its youthful powers, pour forth its life in an aimless series of movements, words, and actions, and by this to develop and to realize itself more fully; all of which is purposeless, but full of meaning nevertheless. . . . That is what play means: it is life, pouring itself forth without aim, seizing upon riches from its own abundant store, significant through the fact of its existence.104

Play may not have purpose but it is full of profound meaning. Play is also an exercise of freedom, exploration, and joyfulness, all of which resonate well with Christian understandings of the act of worship. As Guardini reflects, “To be at play or to fashion a work of art in God’s sight – not to create, but to exist – such is the essence of the liturgy. From this is derived its sublime mingling of profound earnestness and divine joyfulness.”105

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101 Guardini, 38-45.
102 David N. Power, “Ritual and Verbal Image” in Vogel, 182; Caron, 2.
103 Guardini, 41.
104 Ibid., 41-42.
105 Ibid., 43.
At the same time, play (and worship) has structure, even in the context of its free expression: “Have you ever noticed how gravely children draw up the rules of their games, on the form for the melody, the position of the hands, the meaning of this stick and that tree?”

The rubrics of the liturgy facilitate the playful spontaneity, freedom, unselfconsciousness, and transcendence of worship. As Hovda notes, “Liturgy is play, but play has rules, as we know from the games of both children and adults. Rules without which it cannot play because it is social.” On the strength of such insights, Guardini invites his readers to “waste time for the sake of God . . . [and] play the divinely ordained game of the liturgy in liberty and beauty and holy joy before God.”

As playful as worship might be, it also involves an element of risk-taking. Feminist liturgical theologian Janet Walton argues that “to agree to take part in the act of worship is to take a risk.” Participating in the act of worship is a risk because worship is rooted in the divine/human partnership; no one knows in advance what will happen when the human and divine approach one another. In the words of Annie Dillard, “It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake

106 Ibid., 43.
108 Guardini, 44.
someday and take offence, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”

The acts of worship are “mad” risks that make us vulnerable to being changed.

Risk-taking is often accompanied by fear. Many Bible stories illustrate feelings of fear when the human and divine approach one another. The angel that approaches Mary, the angel that calls out to the shepherds in the field watching their flocks by night, and the angel that surprises the women at Jesus’ tomb all proclaim, “Do not be afraid.” This is the angels’ response to the shock and terror experienced by these ordinary people while being approached by such extraordinary messengers from God (Luke 1:30, Luke 2:10, Matthew 28:5).

Worship is an act of risk-taking because it requires a transactional movement between God’s promises to us and our responses to God. This movement requires a bridge of sorts. Bridges connect us and separate us; bridges enable movement and perspective. Worship bridges past, present, and future; it connects memory, imagination, and discovery. Creative energy “emerges when people dare to discover a bridge between what they have always known, what they have been taught, and what they are experiencing now, to shorten the distance between the expression of their faith and their own human experiences.”

Accordingly, so we add worship as play and risk to our list of attributes of worship. Worship is play in the sense that it is undertaken for its own sake and has no purpose beyond itself. It is full of meaning, beauty, joy, and freedom for “the soul to explore” within the structure of the “divinely ordained game of the liturgy.” And yet worship is also an act of risk-taking, constructing tenuous bridges that facilitate frightening and exciting back-and-forth

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111 Walton, 20.

112 Ibid., 21.

113 Guardini, 41, 44.
interactions between Divine promises and human responses. Form and freedom underlie worship as both risk-taking and play.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the dynamics of worship as a human and theological activity, first by considering Ruth Duck’s five theological understandings of worship: ritual, revelation, response, relationship and rehearsal. I then explored ordered liberty, the creative tension between tradition and innovation, or form and freedom, as the distinctive liturgical idiom of The United Church of Canada. Next, I reviewed Charlotte Caron’s eight principles for just worship as a way of further understanding the ethos of worship within the United Church, and concluded with a brief reflection on worship as play and risk-taking. The scholars considered in this chapter have provided materials to construct a robust framework within which to showcase the contributions of the research study participants and their understandings of worship in the UCC. How theological school students are formed into leaders of worship is our next consideration.
Chapter 3

Formation for Worship Leadership: De/Re/Transformation

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the nature of formation for ministry in general and for worship leadership in particular, with references to the Standards of the Association of Theological Schools and scholars who have reflected on formation and its processes. I return to the concept of ordered liberty as an organizing motif not only for worship but also for the process of formation. Next, I reflect on formation as transformative learning, embedded within disruption and community. Images of the presider as steward, bridge, and servant are examined, with Kimberley Bracken Long providing particular insight into the latter. Finally, I consider the action of the Holy Spirit and its significance for the work of presiding.

3.2 A Working Definition of Formation for Ministry

The scope of this research project is the formation of United Church of Canada students as worship leaders in the Atlantic School of Theology chapel. What do we mean by “formation?” In using this term, I do not mean to imply that seminary students are passive lumps of clay that need to be shaped by faculty and staff. Nor do I mean to imply that there is one ideal form for ordained ministry to which each student must conform. However, it is the term employed in the Association of Theological Schools Standards and in the title of my position at AST, and it is broad enough to encompass the multi-faceted aspects of preparation for ministry that requires much more than the acquisition of knowledge.

My understanding of formation begins with a theological claim: theological students are first and foremost children of God, made in God’s image, gifted with a variety of skills and

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talents (to be discovered and cultivated), and claimed and called to serve both as disciples of Christ and servants of the church. Denominations such as the UCC have commended students to our care, having already discerned with them their call to ministry. AST’s students come from across Canada and Bermuda with a wide variety of experiences both within and beyond the church, and represent a range of spiritual, intellectual, and social development. They have already been formed by a history of worship experiences that have been shaped by their geographic and cultural contexts. They bring these experiences with them, as well as their knowledge, attitudes, preferences, and convictions about worship.\textsuperscript{115} These attitudes and habits of worship may run deep. Witvliet reports that the way people worshipped when they first became believers is most significant in shaping their expectations for worship in general.\textsuperscript{116} However, today’s theological students frequently know less about the Christian tradition than previous generations, hailing from a culture that knows less and less of the Christian story.\textsuperscript{117}

Students are not “empty vessels” to be filled with knowledge, but neither do they, when they arrive at AST, have the complete set of knowledge, skills, identity and spirituality that the UCC wishes for its ministers.\textsuperscript{118} I affirm Barbara Blodgett’s contention that ministers are not born but made, and Sharon Daloz Parks’ assertion that “leadership can be taught.”\textsuperscript{119} It is


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 127.


\textsuperscript{118} Foster et al., 5. The apprenticeship of knowledge, skill, and identity formation are named as required features of all professional education by the authors of \textit{Educating Clergy}, a survey of current training for the ministry profession. Apprenticeship in spirituality is distinctive to education for ministry. For the purposes of this study, identity is defined as how participants understand themselves to be as presider, or in other words, their attributes and being as a presider. Spirituality is defined as the participants’ understanding of themselves in relation to the work of God in and through them in worship.
incumbent on those who seek to educate for ministry to meet students as they are and to guide them in educational experiences that value their past but also cast a vision for their future. The UCC Formation Group at AST has a range of students, each with their own preferred ways of learning and their own skill sets.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Standards reflect the range and complexity of formation for ministry in their use of a variety of terms when referring to formation, including intellectual or academic formation, spiritual formation, personal formation, and ministerial, vocational, or professional formation.\textsuperscript{120} Spiritual awareness, moral sensitivity, moral integrity, emotional maturity, personal faith, social concern, and public witness are all terms that are used to describe personal and spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{121} The ATS Standards set out the goal of an M.Div. education as multifaceted formation.

MDiv education has a complex goal: the personal, vocational, spiritual, and academic formation of the student. Because of the importance of a comprehensive community of learning, the MDiv cannot be viewed simply as an accumulation of courses or of individual independent work. The location, or learning environment, can occur in multiple patterns that include, but are not limited to, in-person faculty-student instructional contact on a campus or extension site, online/technologically mediated forms of instruction, supervised ministry practice, and formats that blend instructional modalities. Institutions shall clearly articulate the manner in which they provide the learning environment or supportive context for effective, comprehensive, theological education. An institution shall demonstrate that its students are engaged in a community of learning whereby faculty and students have significant opportunities for interaction, peer learning, development of pastoral skills, supervised experiences of ministry, and growth in personal, spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{119} Barbara J. Blodgett, \textit{Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be: Four Practices for Improving Ministry} (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011), 9; Sharon Daloz Parks, \textit{Leadership Can Be Taught} (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005). Blodgett also cites Carol Dweck's “growth mindset.” No one's potential can be known ahead of time, and "everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (Blodgett, 18).


\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 3., A.2.4, ES.1.2.1.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., A.3.1.1.
The ATS Standards recognize that formation for ministry goes beyond accumulation of information. Ministers must “embody their roles in their very being.”\textsuperscript{123} John Westerhoff defines formation as “an intentional effort to engage in enculturalization, the natural process by which culture, a people’s understandings and ways of life, their world view (perceptions of reality), and their ethos (values and ways of life) are transmitted from one generation to another.”\textsuperscript{124} Westerhoff argues that education is an act of socialization that undertakes to deliberately “transmit or evolve knowledge, attitudes, values, behaviours or sensibilities. . . . [Formation] is a process of transformation and formation, of conversion and nurture.”\textsuperscript{125} He outlines eight key influences on our formation. The first and most important is ritual participation (worship) in the life of the community. The others are the environment; how the community orders time and remembers significant events and people; the organization of the community and how it encourages people to spend their time, energy, talents and resources; how people interact with and treat each other; role models; behavioural disciplines; and the influence of language.\textsuperscript{126}

Ron Anderson utilizes the image of “inhabiting” to illustrate this understanding of formation as enculturalization. He speaks of inhabiting both in the sense of “coming to dwell in” and “making a habit of” practices, patterns and beliefs so that they might “take root in our


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 14, 140.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 140.
bones.”¹²⁷ He cites Paul Gruchow’s essay on the importance of place and home: “To inhabit a place means literally to have made it a habit, to have made it the custom and ordinary practice of our lives, to have learned how to wear a place like a familiar garment, like the garments of sanctity that nuns wore. The word habit, in its now dim original form, meant to own.”¹²⁸ This metaphor also evokes the Biblical text, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (Gal 3:27).

Theological schools do not educate to equip students for specific problems that arise in ministry. The academy could never anticipate everything that a leader might encounter in their future congregations. As Sandra Beardsall asserts, in theological school students develop “habits of the mind and heart. . . In a way, they are ‘prepared’ for nothing, but they are ‘formed’ for everything, or at least for the wide range of surprising situations that pastoral life will inevitably throw at them.”¹²⁹

In *Educating Clergy*, a comprehensive survey of current training for the ministry profession prepared by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the authors set forth what they consider to be the distinguishing feature of professional education – forming in students the “dispositions, habits, knowledge and skills that cohere in professional identity and practice, commitments, and integrity.”¹³⁰ They then take the concept of habit one step further, beyond the embodying of the tradition to equipping for the transformation of the tradition: “Seminary educators seek to form dispositions and the intuitive knowledge, or habitus,

¹²⁷ Anderson, 169.


¹³⁰ Foster et al., 100.
of a given religious or intellectual tradition in students. They intend for students to embody and equip the transformation of these traditions, as inherited ‘rules’ are changed into ‘strategies’ of new engagement to address new situations and circumstances.”\textsuperscript{131} The description of habitus in Educating Clergy orbits around Craig Dykstra’s concept of “pastoral intelligence” or “pastoral imagination” as a “way of seeing into and interpreting the world” that “shapes everything a pastor thinks and does.”\textsuperscript{132} Dykstra recognizes that a student’s responsibility to develop pastoral imagination does not rest solely on seminaries, as students come to seminary already formed by their families, culture, class, experiences, and training. However, Dykstra argues, seminary is the primary setting for intentional cultivation of pastoral imagination, including the classroom, worship, prayer groups, organized activities, Field Education, and Clinical Pastoral Education.

Beardsall notes that formation, or the shaping of a pastoral identity often involves painful moments of “unmaking,” which she describes as “de/re/formation.”\textsuperscript{133} Students need to “lose themselves to find themselves again.”\textsuperscript{134} This understanding of formation complements Walter Brueggemann’s approach. He calls for education to ensure both “continuity of vision, value, and perception so that the community sustains its self identity” and “discontinuity . . . to help transform old traditions and teachings in order to bring new life to a people.”\textsuperscript{135} We will explore this understanding further in the next section on formation as ordered liberty.

Given the foregoing, I offer the following as a working definition of formation. It is the shaping of a student’s knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality in a way that is unique to the

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{133} Beardsall, 49-50.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 50-1.
\textsuperscript{135} Karen Tye, Basics of Christian Education (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 23.
individual but also representative of his or her denomination. All this happens by means of past experiences and multi-layered educational opportunities. Because enculturization is a significant component of the formation process, this shaping can happen consciously or unconsciously, and through experiences and learning that are either intentional or implicit. In the context of theological education, formation takes the shape of students’ own journeys of becoming the minister and worship leader that God would have them be.

3.3 Formation as Ordered Liberty

The dynamic dialectic of “ordered liberty” is an evocative metaphorical lens through which to consider formation for ministry. Brueggemann asserts that “[e]very community that wants to last beyond a single generation must concern itself with education.” The church educates so that the community will be rooted in and faithful to its past (continuity of vision, values, self-identity) and open to the present and future as God calls us forth into new life (discontinuity, change, and new ways of thinking). For Brueggemann, “education must attend both to processes of continuity and discontinuity in order to avoid fossilizing into irrelevance on the one hand, and relativizing into disappearance on the other hand.” Brueggemann’s concepts of continuity and discontinuity echo the description of formation as the embodying of the tradition and equipping for the transformation of the tradition found in Foster’s *Educating Clergy*.

The dynamic dialectics of order and liberty, continuity and discontinuity, tradition and transformation are helpful in describing formation for ministry. If formation for ministry is the

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137 Tye, 23.

138 Brueggemann, 1.
shaping of the student’s knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality in a way that is unique to the individual but also representative of his or her denomination, then formation for worship leadership might be described as the acquisition of knowledge (e.g. the liturgical calendar and patterns of worship); the honing of skills (e.g. choosing music or writing prayers); the development of a pastoral identity that exhibits virtues such as humility and gracious hospitality; and the integration of all this within a spirituality of gratitude and appreciation for all the ways that God blesses and is blessed by the faith community through acts of worship.\textsuperscript{139}

As noted in Chapter 1, good formation will mean that students learn to plan and lead worship in imaginative and nimble ways, shifting worship practices as the world changes. They need to do this without thoughtlessly bending to the latest fad, but instead by solidly rooting worship practices in scripture and the United Church tradition of “ordered liberty.” Worship patterns may indeed change, but worship at its best will remain able to connect people to God and to one another, and to connect the needs of the world with the desires of God for the world. Both an intact sense of order and a confident sense of liberty are needed to accomplish this.

3.4 Formation as Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow’s work on transformative learning theory is pertinent to consider at this juncture. O’Sullivan’s definition of transformative learning provides an apt context for reflecting on Mezirow’s contribution:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and actions. It is a shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative

\textsuperscript{139} Witvliet, 130.
approaches to living and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.\textsuperscript{140}

Such a “deep, structural shift” does not come naturally to anyone, but education, experience, and formation may provoke it. Mezirow proposes that the catalyst for this shift in meaning perspective is a “disorienting dilemma” that disrupts the student’s frame of reference and causes him or her to re-examine her or his assumptions.\textsuperscript{141} This disruption is often accompanied by emotions such as anger or fear. Critically reflecting on underlying assumptions can lead to the transformation of perspective and to action based on new perspectives. The primary method of accomplishing this critical reflection is dialogue, Mezirow argues. Other researchers also advocate extra-rational ways of knowing, including mindfulness meditation, contemplative practices, compassion, imagination, and dreams.\textsuperscript{142} Consistent with Mezirow’s transformative learning process is Beardsall’s naming of the often-painful moments involved in formation as “unmaking” and her identification of the shaping of pastoral identity as “de/re/formation.”\textsuperscript{143} As Parks describes Ronald Heifetz’s approach to the learning process, she refers to it as moving from “a familiar but inadequate equilibrium - through disequilibrium - to a more adequate equilibrium,” which usually involves “loss, grief, conflict, risk, stress, and creativity.”\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{143} Beardsall, 49-50.

\textsuperscript{144} Parks, 9.
According to Mezirow’s model, the educator functions as both “facilitator” and “provocateur” in the transformative learning process. As provocateur, the educator “challenges, stimulates, and provokes critical thinking.” As facilitator, the educator is a supportive presence who shapes a hospitable space for group learning, fosters healthy group process, encourages student engagement in reflective discourse, draws out new learning through posing good questions, and introduces textual and other resources. As Vogel notes, “The art of teaching is knowing when and how to support and when and how to challenge adult learners.”

In the context of the UCC Formation Group at Atlantic School of Theology, the roles of provocateur and facilitator are shared. The worship experience itself is often the provocateur. Students and staff can provoke new learning through the sharing of both informal and formal feedback. The community of staff, faculty, and students also shares the responsibilities of the facilitator. While the primary purpose of the seminary is the formation of individual students for the practice of ministry, the group of students that gathers each Wednesday at AST are essentially a community or “communion” that shapes a hospitable space for learning. Stookey makes the claim that “the congregation, not the individual, is the irreducible unit of Christianity.” Further, the relationship within the members of the Trinity provides a model for the UCC Formation community. Moltmann describes the relationship of the members of the Trinity in this way: “the divine persons are ‘habitable’ for one another, giving each other open

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146 Fleischer, 152.


life-space for their mutual indwelling. . . . Each person is indwelling and room-giving at the same time."\textsuperscript{149} So also members of the Formation community facilitate each other’s learning by making space for one another, and seeking each other’s well-being.

The Biblical tradition provides fertile ground for deepening this understanding of formation as transformative learning. The story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) offers a helpful illustration. The disciples on the road have experienced Jesus’ death and have heard rumours of his resurrection. These are events that they cannot comprehend in their present meaning schemes, akin to Mezirow’s disorienting dilemma. When Jesus joins them (unrecognized), and they share with him their sadness and confusion, he replies, “How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have declared!” (Luke 24:25). In this statement Jesus is playing the role of “provocateur.”\textsuperscript{150} Jesus assists in broadening their current meaning schemes, making way for the transformation of their perspectives to encompass a larger vision by interpreting “the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Later at table he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Then their eyes are opened, they recognize him, and the transformative learning process is complete. They experience a “shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters their way of being in the world.”\textsuperscript{151} This transformation results in action, as transformations characteristically do, and the disciples get up “that same hour” to return to Jerusalem, rejoin their community, and proclaim the good news.


\textsuperscript{150} Mezirow, “Theory to Practice,” 11.

\textsuperscript{151} O’Sullivan, 11.
Whether theological students experience a few disorienting dilemmas or many cumulative smaller shifts in perspective, they participate in transformative learning as they transition from congregant to worship leader. They come to perceive God, the church, worship, and themselves differently, discovering and shaping “a way of seeing into and interpreting the world which shapes everything a pastor thinks and does.”

The deep value in this study of Beardsall’s and Mezirow’s schemas are their applicability to understanding the process of formation for ministry. For example, when considering the process of formation for worship leadership, it is important to first acknowledge that simply attending worship “fashions” people. Harris writes, “We are educated to prayer, and we are educated by prayer.” Prayer in this case includes corporate worship. Recall the phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*; practices of prayer shape how and what one believes, and the reverse.

In short, the experience of worshipping itself operates as an implicit curriculum. Learning becomes explicit when the experience of worship is reflected upon in deliberate, disciplined, sustained ways, ideally bringing the experience of worship into dialogue with classroom learning. Intentional reflection on the experience of attending, planning, and leading worship both educates students in the planning and leading of worship, and helps them to engage more fully and deeply in their worship life.

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154 Foster et al., 22; Tye, 94, 115.
In contrast, Christopher Brittain cautions against focussing too much on the process of formation. Brittain emphasizes that content is the primary concern, and reminds his readers of the importance of knowledge (in negotiating practices and habits) and of concreteness (in identifying central practices.) In the interest of precisely this knowledge and concreteness, I have already engaged Duck’s theological categories of worship as ritual, revelation, response, relationship, and rehearsal; Kervin’s understanding of the dialectic of ordered liberty in UCC worship; and Caron’s eight theological principles for just UCC worship. What remains is the content of worship leadership. I now turn to the work of Long and Hovda on the role of the presider as servant and steward of the assembly, one who can “get in the way of” or “open the way to” an encounter with the holy in worship.

3.5 Presider as Steward, Bridge, and Servant of the Assembly

Since Justin Martyr used the term in the second century, the worship leader has been known as the presider, one called out from the midst of the faith community to ensure that the Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments enacted. The presider is a “servant of the assembly” and “steward of the kingdom of God” who faithfully leads “a worshipping assembly in its encounter with the one, triune, holy God who meets us in Scripture and preaching; in water, bread, and wine; in singing and praying; in almsgiving; in gathering and sending.” During the Sacrament of communion, the presider sets the table, invokes the Spirit, reminds the assembly of salvation history, invites participants forward, breaks open the bread, and distributes the meal.

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156 Ibid., 146, 151.


158 Ibid., 8, 2.
The image of *bridge* is also a helpful metaphor for presiding. Taft describes liturgy as a bridge spanning the space between the two almost-touching fingers of God and Adam (representing humanity) on Michelangelo’s ceiling in the Sistine chapel. As Taft puts it, “God in the Sistine metaphor is a creating, life-giving, saving, redeeming hand, ever reaching out toward us, and salvation history is the story of our hands raised (or refusing to be raised) in never-ending reception of, and thanksgiving for, that gift.” Liturgy bridges the gap between the life-giving gesture of God and our human response. The bridge metaphor is doubly helpful because it describes the action of the presider as well. As servant of the assembly, the presider seeks to provide opportunities for the congregation to connect to God, to one another, and the needs of the world with God’s desires for the world.

Jesus taught his hearers to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). Presiders bring their bodies, minds, and spirits to the task of leading worship, as well as their knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality. Hovda is quick to point out that of all of these elements, the presider’s spirituality is the most important. “The best of presiding techniques appear shrill, pretentious, self-assertive, and empty,” he claims, “without [depth and commitment of faith.] The worst techniques are made bearable (if not delectable) by [faith’s] presence.” The spirituality of service is the foundational practice of presiders.

Long utilizes the categories of eyes and ears, mouth, hands, feet, and heart to structure her reflections on presiding as a servant of the assembly. These metaphors for presiding provide

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160 Ibid., 139.

161 Hovda, 13.
a helpful system of organization for our exploration of the role of presider, so I will consider them here in greater detail.

3.5.1 Eyes and Ears

The effective presider listens intently to the community and watches closely for the inbreaking of God’s realm of shalom, “through the prism of Christian hope.” All worship is contextual, and planning for worship begins with attending to the context and needs of the gathered community. Also important to the planning of worship is how the congregation’s role in worship is understood. Good liturgy is community action. Effective presiders also use their eyes and ears to attend closely in the worship service in order to help the congregation participate more fully. Hovda writes that although ministers need not “‘devour’ the congregation with their eyes, there should be a constant exchange of interested, compassionate, encouraging looks not only during the readings and the homily, but also during prayers and songs and silences.” Paying close visual attention in worship also allows the presider the opportunity to improvise and respond with grace to unexpected challenges.

3.5.2 Mouth

The importance of voice and speech in Christian worship cannot be overstated. God spoke the world into being (Gen.1:3) and God’s fullest revelation is the Word incarnated and “uttered,” Jesus Christ (John 1:1). To be Christian is to “hear the Word and then to testify.” The mouth is the instrument of proclamation, prayer, and song. Through actions such as

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163 Hovda, 18.
164 Ibid., 76.
166 Ibid., 50.
these, common words are transformed so that Christ is made known. Presiders proclaim scripture, invite confession, share words of affirmation, evoke the people’s prayers, speak blessing, and choose hymns with the intention that through them, God’s living Word, the good news of the gospel will “resonate through the body of Christ and out into the world.” Careful thought is required when choosing the words that make up worship services. Effective liturgical language should be “Biblical, creative, eloquent, imaginative and expansive” and “a good presider is one who draws her congregation into the ancient dance with a new song.”

Ramshaw advocates for the use of vernacular language in worship, so that it can be understood. However, liturgical language also needs a poetic element that “bear[s] the weight of the gospel, words that express not only intimacy, but also awe and humility, as we dare to address the creator of the cosmos.” On a real and meaningful level, the words used by the presider are intended to draw worshippers into an experience of the Holy.

On a final note, Long asserts the importance of the presider’s presence when delivering his or her well-chosen words. Presiders must “believe what they say.”

3.5.3 Hands

 Hands are eloquent, expressive, beautiful, and important tools for presiding. Hovda writes that it is “no accident that the language of human love is so much a language of the hands.” The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is symbolized in the laying on of hands. When

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167 Ibid., 75.
168 Ibid., 68, 7.
169 Gail Ramshaw cited in Long, ibid., 70-1.
170 Ibid., 75.
171 Ibid., 77.
172 Hovda, 78-9.
passing the peace through touch, the congregation leans into the reign of God. The bread of life is broken open and shared by hand. The congregation’s movements are guided with the lift of a hand. Presiders anoint with oil and pray and baptize and bless with a touch of the hand. Given these many actions, the effective presider needs to be intentional about gestures, using them in ways that enhance the meaning of the words they speak.\footnote{Long, \textit{Worshipping Body}, 77.}

3.5.4 Feet

Within the category of feet are the worship space itself as well as movement through the space. Attention to the space in which we worship, including visual art, furniture, placement of equipment, and movement through the space can create space for encounter with the divine. Presiders in particular need to give attention to moving gracefully and with purpose during acts of worship. Also of import in worship is the movement from the sanctuary to the world, making connections between what is enacted in worship and what God calls God’s people to do in the world. Long integrates the movement within the worship space with the movement beyond it by remarking that “[e]very act of worship points not only to how we might be more fully blessed, or bettered, or healed, but also to how the whole world might be brought to wholeness and completion.”\footnote{Ibid., 108-109.}

3.5.5 Heart

Biblical and Christian language often seats the will, emotions, and even the mind within the heart. The presider’s action in worship “springs forth from the heart. For all of the skill and practice we put into it, what dwells in the heart is the fount from which faithful presiding
springs.”175 Presiding from the heart, in Long’s understanding, involves five essential practices, or ways of being. 176 First, the presider prepares the liturgy knowing the internal logic, rhythms, and flow of the service. The presider understands at a deep level the meaning of each element of the service, and where the service as a whole is going.

Second, the presider’s work flows out of a deep well of personal prayer in and with the assembly. It is Hovda’s position that a genuine, operative personal faith is essential to the presider’s work, as well as a disposition to prayer.177 Long suggests that in order to lead worship “as one who worships,” after all the planning and preparation are done, the presider must let go and give the service over to God.178 This means trusting others and oneself, putting away fears and concerns about whether one is liked or if the congregation is impressed, and self-forgiveness when mistakes are made.

Long’s third essential practice for presiding from the heart is to know, love, and even revere the congregation in the midst of their realities, struggles, gifts, and joys.

Authenticity is the fourth practice of presiding from the heart. Long suggests that authenticity flows from bringing one’s whole flawed, gifted self, with “all of our strengths and weaknesses, idiosyncrasies and particularities,” to the task of presiding.179 Being authentic does not mean acting casual or natural or blasé, but bringing one’s best self to the task as faithfully, humbly, and joyfully as possible.180

175 Ibid., 111.
176 Ibid., 111-115.
177 Hovda, 12.
179 Ibid., 114.
180 Ibid., 115.
Long’s final “heart” practice is to preside with passion, to preside with “the deep conviction that every bit of it matters.”\textsuperscript{181} The foundation of presiding is the vision of the coming reign of God that “gathers us as the people of God, frees us for living the Christian life, and fuels us for working with God to help bring in the kingdom.”\textsuperscript{182} This is not a personal passion or self-expression, praying according to individual “agendas or enthusiasms.”\textsuperscript{183} There is an abandonment of self, “an intentional submitting of our own wills to the will of Christ.”\textsuperscript{184} This passion is about being caught up in the vision of the reign of God and in the promise of the Holy Spirit who invites God’s people to be a part of this amazing work.

In summary, the work of Hovda and Long point toward the kind of content to be included in formation for presiding at worship. The presider acts as a steward of the community’s worship life, a bridge that both provides opportunities for congregants to fully engage in the work of worship and opens ways to encounter the Holy. The presider is a servant of the assembly that bears forth the Word of God through eyes and ears, mouth, hands, feet, and heart. The presider is not alone in this work, for the Holy Spirit is present also. In the final section of this chapter, we turn our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in worship.

3.6 Four-fold Actions of the Holy Spirit

Because neither the presider nor the educator work alone, I complete this chapter with a reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in worship presiding and in the formation process. In the preface to the United Church’s 1932 \textit{Book of Common Order}, the Holy Spirit is said to act in worship through the soul of [humanity], through Jesus Christ, and through the tradition, causing

\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid., 115.]
\item[Ibid., 115.]
\item[Ibid., 115.]
\item[Ibid., 115.]
\end{enumerate}
“certain forms of prayers to glow with light and power.” 185 To understand the role of the Holy Spirit in worship and the formation process, I will offer a few remarks on the problem of speaking of the Holy Spirit, then turn to the work of Eugene Rogers’ on the four-fold actions of the Holy Spirit: befriending, opening, empowering, and transfiguring. 186

First we must acknowledge the difficulty in speaking of the Holy Spirit. Any attempts to focus on the Spirit are “bound to be blurred.” 187 Deane warns that the Spirit resists our gaze and systematization, instead refracting our gaze toward the Father and the Son. 188 As a result, it may be tempting to identify the Spirit as the “power of Jesus Christ.” The Holy Spirit ought not to be seen as a disembodied, abstract, impersonal energy or life force, superfluous to the saving work of God through Creator and Christ. Instead, I endorse Rogers’ position that the Holy Spirit is a Person with her own personality, inextricably linked with the other two members of the Trinity, but immanently present of her own will, acting through bodily people, places and things, dispensing her gifts, and opening up possibilities of something new. Despite the indefinability of the Holy Spirit, she is a Person who acts in the Biblical story. She overshadows Mary, descends over the Jordan, drives Jesus into the wilderness, participates in the resurrection, alights on the disciples, and dispenses gifts.

185 The United Church of Canada, Common Order, iii.

186 I have replaced Rogers term “dilate” with the term “opening” in an attempt to offer a more expansive understanding than Rogers’ gynaecological metaphor, which has roots in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Eugene F. Rogers, After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West (Grand Rapids. MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 98.


Like many theologians, Rogers claims that all actions of the Triune God toward the cosmos are indivisible. Even so, the actions of the Holy Spirit become distinctly visible within Scripture, especially in passages that involve intratrinitarian interactions such as the stories of the annunciation, the baptism of Jesus, the transfiguration, the crucifixion, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, and the resurrection of Jesus. In all these stories, the Spirit characteristically “rests” on the Son.189 One could argue that the verb “to rest” sums up many of the other verbs used by the Biblical writers to depict the presence of the Spirit upon its object: “come upon” (Luke 1:35), “be in” (Gen 41:38), “hover” (Gen 1:2), “descend” (Matt 3:16), “fall upon” (Acts 10:44), “overshadow” (Luke 1:35), and “dwell in” (Rom 8:9).190

Drawing on Rogers’ scholarship on the various ways that the Spirit rests on the Son in *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West*, I have categorized the work of the Spirit as four key actions: befriending, opening, empowering, and transfiguring.191 All four of these actions have strong connections to the practice of corporate worship. After describing each action, I will link the Spirit’s action with the action of presiding in worship, with reference to the work of Hovda and Long.

### 3.6.1 Befriending

The Holy Spirit hovers over the waters of creation, the waters of Mary’s womb, Jesus in the waters of the Jordan, and the waters of the baptismal font. Because the Spirit has befriended physical matter, she can work through such things as water, bread, wine, oil, and people to accomplish her work. As Ephrem the Syrian puts it, “The oil is the dear friend of the Holy

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189 Rogers, 14.

190 Additional verbs and Biblical references can be found in *ibid.*, 62-63.

191 Ibid.
Spirit, it serves him, following him like a disciple.”192 The sacrament of communion is a key opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work through befriended matter. The Spirit pours out on the bread, the wine, and the people, all to sustain the body of Christ.193 In the local assembly, God works through “a series of real, flesh-and-blood things rooted in experience but reinterpreted, transfigured, by the Spirit’s breath: a common story, the water of life, and food and drink; that is the proclamation of the gospel and the enactment of that gospel in baptism and the Eucharist.”194 The book, the font, the table, the oil, the water, the bread and wine, and the people gathered as the body of Christ all come alive through the befriending of the Spirit.

3.6.2 Opening

The action of opening is key to Rogers’ understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit opens the womb of Mary so that God might become incarnate, the Holy Spirit witnesses to the love within the Trinity between the Parent and Child in such a way that she opens up the intratrinitarian life in order to incorporate or absorb human beings into the trinitarian dance of God’s self-giving love. She bridges the distance between God and humanity by collapsing it and absorbing creation into the trinitarian embrace.

The Holy Spirit also opens human eyes to see God’s truth, opens hearts to receive the love of God, opens spirits to pray, and opens mouths to sing with thanksgiving and praise. Calvin teaches that “[T]he Lord . . . illumines our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit and opens our hearts for the Word and sacraments to enter in, which would otherwise only strike our

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192 Ephrem the Syrian cited in ibid., viii.
193 Long, Worshipping Body, 81.
194 Samuel Torvend cited in ibid., 30.
ears and appear before our eyes, but not at all affect us within.”\textsuperscript{195} Apart from the Holy Spirit, the human heart remains closed, unable to receive the transforming grace of God.

3.6.3 Empowering

In Genesis 1, the Holy Spirit breathes into a clump of clay and brings humanity to life. Accompanied by wind and flame, the Spirit brings the church to life at Pentecost in Acts 1. She is a giver of life, quickening, animating, inspiring, and equipping the church for the life of the world. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to those she alights upon to build up the body of Christ and to equip it to live out the vision of the coming reign of God in daily life.\textsuperscript{196} In the New Testament, Paul writes that all are given gifts of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

The Spirit is more than a still small voice; she drives Jesus into the wilderness. It is by the power of the Spirit that presiders can serve. “[E]ven at our most technically skilled,” writes Long, “we are but hollow shells without the indwelling and outpouring of the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{197} It is by the Spirit that preachers can preach. “The Spirit moves through us like a wind as we exhale sound into the world,”\textsuperscript{198} saturating our “frail and imperfect words that they might show forth something of the divine Word.”\textsuperscript{199} When presiders give themselves over to the Spirit in preparing and leading worship, then they “are lifted up and carried, enabled, and infused by the Holy Spirit. We do not cease to be ourselves, yet we are not only ourselves, and certainly not

\textsuperscript{195} Calvin cited in \textit{ibid.}, 118.

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}, 110.

\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}, 118.

\textsuperscript{198} Stephen H. Webb cited in \textit{ibid}, 53.

\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Ibid.}, 59.
only for our sakes, but . . . for the sake of the worshipping body.” It is the Holy Spirit’s purpose, in part, to empower both worshipper and presider.

3.6.4 Transfiguring

Eastern Orthodox exegesis traditionally sees the Spirit in the cloud “overshadowing” Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). The Holy Spirit also works to transfigure, refashion, transform, habituate, and infuse the people, places, and things that the Spirit befriends. Rogers uses the term deification for this work of the Spirit. Wesley’s term, sanctification, is better suited to The United Church of Canada’s theological orientation.

The Holy Spirit moves in the lives and experiences of the congregation constantly “making all things new.” She transforms an imperfect collection of individuals into a new creation, the body of Christ, the church, to be sent into the world. For Wesley, the Spirit witnesses to and inspires love of God and of neighbour: “by this intercourse between God and [humanity,] the fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained and the child of God grows up.” This increasing conformity with the Son, making humanity like God, is sanctification. Basil of Caesarea wrote:

All who are in need of sanctification turn to the Spirit . . . for his [sic] breath refreshes them and comes to their aid in the pursuit of their natural and proper end. . . . Souls in which the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send for their grace to others. From here comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden the sharing of the gifts of grace, heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, being made like God and – the greatest of them all – being made God.

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200 Ibid., 119.
201 Ibid., 45.
202 Wesley cited in Outler, 11-12.
While Basil’s reference to “being made God” is a theologically fraught claim, Biblical phrases like “In the last days God poured out God’s Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 3:1/Acts 2:17-18) provide insight for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit dwelling within, inhabiting human creatures.\textsuperscript{204} To inhabit, in Aquinas’ terms, is to “habituate, to dwell dispositionally or by training in limbs and muscles physically readied, for love’s sake, to act. To inhabit is to habituate, to render love bodily.”\textsuperscript{205} Deane likens this process of inhabiting or indwelling to liquid saturating a porous sponge. This permeation of the Spirit transforms people, shaping human desires to become more like God’s desires, and making us capable of doing things we couldn’t do before on our own.\textsuperscript{206} Worship, accordingly, is a site where the self is shaped and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Each of these four categories of the Spirit’s active work – befriending, opening, empowering, and transfiguring – is embodied in corporate worship. I would argue that the Holy Spirit’s actions of befriending, opening, empowering, and transfiguring can be seen in the process of formation as well. Long asserts that presiders are made, not born, and that the process of becoming a presider takes time. The work of formation shapes effective, not perfect, presiders. Presiders can “get in the way of” or, in contrast, “open the way to” an encounter with the holy in worship.\textsuperscript{207} When presiders continually give themselves over to the Spirit in preparing for and leading worship, the Spirit does not disappoint, for they are befriended, caught

\textsuperscript{204} Romans 8:9

\textsuperscript{205} Aquinas cited in Rogers, 54.


\textsuperscript{207} Long, Worshipping Body, 10.
up and carried, infused and empowered, even transformed by the Spirit for the sake of worship, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of the world.\textsuperscript{208}

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, we have explored a working definition of formation, and considered the metaphor of formation as “ordered liberty.” We explored Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning and its implications for the processes of formation. Then, because the reality into which people are formed is as important as how they are formed, we examined the presider as steward, bridge, and the servant of the assembly, as expressed through Long’s lens of eyes and ears, mouth, hands, feet, and heart. Finally, Rogers’ work on the Holy Spirit was outlined and applied to the practice of presiding in worship and the process of formation for ministry. The multi-faceted framework for our study of formation of students as worship leaders in the chapel of Atlantic School of Theology has now been laid. Next we turn to the qualitative research project component of this study.

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 118.
Chapter 4

Methodology: Description of the Ministry-in-Action Project and Process of Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the qualitative research project undertaken to fulfill the Ministry-in-action component of the D.Min. thesis. Using case study methodology, a three-stage study was designed to include a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group. Using these data collection methods, United Church of Canada ministers who graduated from Atlantic School of Theology between 2011 and 2014 reflected on the impact of their AST chapel experiences on their current worship leadership. In the chapter, I outline the process utilized to analyze the data collected in the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group. The chapter concludes with a review of the ethical implications of the research project.

4.2 Case Study Methodology

In what ways have students’ experiences in AST chapel worship contributed to their formation as worship leaders within The United Church of Canada? A qualitative research study was designed using case study methodology to learn about the lived experiences of theological students as they attended, planned, led, and reflected on worship in the theological school chapel; how those experiences shaped or formed them as worship leaders; the kind of issues that impacted their formation; the strategies that were employed by the participants in the process and to what effect; and what might be learned from this inquiry to foster the formation of current theological students as worship leaders. Creswell describes case study methodology as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and
reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.\textsuperscript{209} Creswell, Myers, and Sensing all assert that case study is an effective methodology for evaluating a specific practice or program’s effectiveness, making it an appropriate methodology for studying the effectiveness of students’ participation in the bounded system of the theological school chapel for their formation as UCC worship planners and leaders.\textsuperscript{210}

This methodology is well-suited to explore the role of the theological school chapel setting in encouraging and discouraging the formation of AST students as worship leaders. First, it produces in-depth narrative descriptions of the ordinary lived experiences of individuals attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship within the bounded system of Wednesday afternoon UC Formation worship experiences in the AST chapel. It requires detailed contextual analysis and critical reflection on the issues of why and how the phenomenon of formation for worship leadership occurs and what it means for individuals.\textsuperscript{211} Case study methodology brings lived experiences into conversation with previous research.\textsuperscript{212} It proposes informed and reasoned recommendations for future action.\textsuperscript{213} Case study recognizes the complexity of ministerial situations and the multi-layered nature of the process of formation for worship leadership.\textsuperscript{214} It also embraces multiple data collection sources, including


\textsuperscript{210} Unlike other qualitative research methodologies, there is variance among researchers concerning the criteria of the case study methods and methodology. I draw on Creswell, Myers, and Sensing, as they agree on the efficacy of case study methodology for the evaluation of a specific practice or program. Creswell, 80; William R. Myers, \textit{Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program}, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2000); and Sensing, 141.

\textsuperscript{211} Sensing, 142.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 141.
interviews, questionnaires, field notes, artifacts, focus groups, and observations, which increase
the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the case study approach assumes that researcher and
participants are proactive participants in the study.215 This assumption is important because it
recognizes my role as Formation Director in the shaping of the current UCC worship ethos at
AST, and it utilizes the collaborative approach that I seek to embody in my work with students.

4.3 Research Project Design

Sensing’s approach to case study methodology was instrumental in the design of this
project. In order to increase the credibility of the study results, a three-stage process was
selected: a questionnaire; one-on-one interviews; and a focus group.216 This enabled
triangulation of data collection methods; triangulation of thinking, writing, and speaking; and
triangulation of insider, researcher, and outsider.217 As case study methodology borrows tools
from other methodologies, there were many data collection methods available to me.218 I chose
the questionnaire, interview, and focus group as best suited to my research question and the
circumstances of my participants.

The questionnaire allowed as many people as possible to participate in the study, and for
people to think about prior events and to bring to consciousness learning that may have
happened on a subconscious level before crafting their responses to the questions. Their
responses painted the broad strokes of the painting, setting the background for the more detailed
information captured in the interviews. The interviews provided time for the in-depth

215 Myers, xii.
216 Sensing, 220.
217 Ibid., 75.
218 Myers, 5.
storytelling that provides the “rich, thick description” valued by qualitative research.\textsuperscript{219} As Sensing notes, “Interviews allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher by observation.”\textsuperscript{220} Semi-structured interviews have the advantages of allowing the interviewer to vary the order of the questions, to ask follow-up questions in order to clarify respondents’ meanings, to probe for more detailed responses, and to give space to the interviewees to ask their own questions. The focus group afforded opportunities to review the information gathered in the questionnaires and the interviews, “see deeper meaning in the data,” and move toward “creatively synthesiz[ing] the data in a holistic fashion.”\textsuperscript{221}

\textbf{4.4 Selection of Participants}

All AST alumni/ae who participated in the on-campus UCC Formation program and graduated between 2011 and 2014, who are ordained, and are currently worship leaders in UCC congregations were invited to participate in the first stage of the study, the written questionnaire. My rationale for focusing on the group of students who graduated between 2011 and 2014 was that the participants would have been in ministry long enough to have settled into consistent patterns of worship leadership, and briefly enough to remember past events experienced at AST. This maximum variation sampling provided the broadest range possible of perspectives on the research topic.

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\textsuperscript{220} Sensing, 103.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 181, 197.
At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a one-hour interview by phone or in person. Five of these volunteers were invited for an interview. Criteria for choosing this purposive sample included balancing age, gender, and geographical location; depth of articulation of experience; and diversity of opinion in the questionnaire.

Three other volunteers were asked to participate in Stage 3 of the study, the focus group. This group surveyed the initial data analysis together, further defined and explored the process of formation for worship leadership, and proposed conclusions or recommendations. These three were chosen based on geographical proximity, fair representation of the Formation Group, and representation of different years of study. They were joined by an experienced Formation Director from another denomination, who provided an outsider’s perspective, and by me.

4.5 Questionnaire

Following the receipt of approval by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, invitations to participate in the study were sent out by email in November 2015 to all the UCC Formation alumni who were ordained, graduated between 2011 and 2014, and were currently active in ministry in a congregational setting. The letter outlined the scope of the study, its goals, and the benefits of participating. Of the 25 potential candidates for the study, 16 participants submitted a signed consent form and 15 completed and returned the questionnaire.

222 Ibid., 84, 221.

223 Although identified in this thesis as an outside expert (OE), the guest Formation Director may be more accurately described as an “insider outsider,” as she serves or has served at AST as a Formation Director for at least four years. It is my belief that her non-United Church denominational affiliation and lack of participation in the UCC Formation Group gave her enough distance to help identify the focus group’s unarticulated assumptions and questions.

224 Please see Appendix D for the Letter of Invitation.
the last of which arrived February 29, 2016. At least half of each graduating class completed the questionnaire. The respondents live in British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. At 1:4, the male:female questionnaire response rate was consistent with the male:female ratio in their United Church Formation program. Almost all of the respondents are Canadian, of Anglo-Celtic descent, and come from middle/upper middle class families, as is typical of the AST student body. As Masters degree graduates, they enjoy the privilege that higher education affords. As university students, many also experienced the financial strain of studying full-time, while anticipating employment immediately following their ordination.

The questionnaire was designed to glean UCC worship leaders’ current understanding of their worship leadership, and the possible influences of their experiences in theological school chapel on their current worship leadership. It began with “grand tour” questions to set the stage for narrower guided, descriptive and interpretive questions that focused on knowledge, behaviour and opinion to reveal participants’ “goals, intentions, desires and values.”

Specifically, it sought to collect alumni/ae understandings on the following topics:

1) their understanding of the meaning and purpose of worship in general and characteristics of United Church worship in particular (Q1 and 2);

2) the role of presider as worship planner and leader, and values they hold before them as they plan and lead worship (Q3, 4 and 5);

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Please see Appendix E for the Consent Form, and Appendix F for the Questionnaire. To ensure the security of the data, the questionnaires were stored in a locked fire-proof safe.

Sensing. 86-88.
3) how their experiences in theological school chapel have informed their current worship leadership, specifically their knowledge, skill, identity and spirituality (Q6, 7 and 8);
4) their expectations of theological school chapel worship, and the possible effects of those expectations on participants’ experiences (Q9);
5) liturgical resources that alumni currently rely on in their worship planning (Q10);
6) any additional comments the participant wished to share (Q11); and
7) willingness to be interviewed (Q12).

Not wanting to limit the participants’ responses, the questions were designed to be open-ended, while focusing respondents’ attention on varied and specific aspects of the research study question. The results of the questionnaire are reported thematically in the following chapter. To report the results, each participant was assigned a randomly chosen pseudonym.

4.6 Interviews

Of the 15 respondents, 14 agreed to an interview, one preferring the opportunity to “ponder, reflect, and write” before responding to questions. Five of the volunteers were chosen for one-on-one interviews according to the criteria of 1) depth of articulation of experience in their questionnaire, and 2) the balance of several factors including age, gender, amount of congregational experience before beginning their theological studies, geographic location, year of graduation, and diversity of opinion expressed in the questionnaire. The interviews took place between April and August 2016, two in person and three using Skype, and they ranged in length from 55 to 75 minutes. All were recorded with the participant’s consent.

227 These words were by a study participant, “Joy,” in her questionnaire comments (question 12). In subsequent references to study participants’ remarks, I will footnote participants’ remarks with the following coding: the pseudonym, the format (Q=questionnaire; I=interview; FG=focus group; TR=transcript review), and the question number to which they were responding (for example, Joy Q12).
(audio only) and were stored on encrypted data sticks. During and immediately following the interviews, I also took field notes to identify key phrases, note body language, facial expressions and tone, and my own personal reactions or insights. According to Sensing, field notes are the most efficient way to gather data from the researcher’s perspective. These field notes were reviewed in order to facilitate interpretation of the research data, make changes to the interview/focus group protocol, and identify questions to follow up on. Keeping field notes also assisted in reflexivity, that is, the open acknowledgement of the key role I play both in the research process and the program under study.

The interviews were constructed with the following pattern: backward questions, exploring past experiences; inward questions, extrapolating meaning and learning from past experiences; and forward questions, inviting hopes for future programming. The interview began with two questions asking for descriptive words. These questions were intended to ease participants into the interview, allow feeling responses, and to create a frame in which to hold the participants’ responses to later questions. Next the interviewees were asked to relate in general what planning and leading worship meant to them while they were students, giving the study participants an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own terms.

The core of the interview was the consideration of a story or two from the participant’s chapel experience, inquiring specifically about the possible impact of a variety factors on these

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228 Sensing, 180.

229 Ibid., 76

230 Ibid., 108.

231 The questions I posed were “1) What 2 or 3 words would you use to describe your overall experience at AST? 2) Narrowing your focus to Chapel worship, which two or three words would characterize your experience in AST chapel worship (can be attending, planning or leading?)”

232 Sensing, 86.
experiences, in an attempt to create a rich, thick description of the participants’ experiences and an understanding of how formation happens in the chapel setting.\textsuperscript{233}

The interview then turned its attention to broader questions of the participant’s current understandings of planning and leading worship, because the ministerial knowledge, skills, identity and spirituality of the persons who are being formed in the Formation program are also important.\textsuperscript{234} The interviewee was invited to share metaphors for their worship leadership, as metaphors simplify, clarify, and summarize self-understanding.\textsuperscript{235} One question considered influences other than chapel worship that have impacted their development into the worship leader they are now, in order to determine chapel’s influence within the larger scheme. Finally, looking toward recommendations for the future, the interviewee was asked what three wishes or hopes they have for current students in UCC Formation worship.

At the conclusion of each interview, a transcript was prepared and sent to the interviewee with a few questions to follow up on specific statements that they made, as well as two additional questions:

1) Is there anything you would like to clarify or add to your responses?

\textsuperscript{233} The questions I posed were “4) Tell me a story or two of your experiences in chapel worship, especially those you recall as being particularly important or developmental for you as a worship leader. What was done (act)? When or where was it done (scene)? Who did it (agent)? How did he or she do it (agency)? What was the response, emotional and other (reaction)? Why was it done (purpose)? What was the result/behaviour change? a) Firstly, please describe your reflection process. What did it look like for you as you processed your experience and what you learned from it? b) What did you bring personally to the situation that influenced your experience? (Could be personality or attitudes or expectations or prior experiences or hopes or . . . .) c) What spiritual or theological factors influenced your experience and learning? d) How did the learning environment contribute? (could be physical space, program structure, ethos . . . .) e) How did your classmates, faculty, or others influence your learning experience? f) Did you encounter any spoken or unspoken values about United church worship, Wed afternoon worship or AST chapel worship? g) Where was God in this experience?”

\textsuperscript{234} Example questions included: “9) Describe the joys and challenges of presiding at worship. 10) Good presiding tries to accomplish . . . . 11) When you preside in worship, what sorts of things do you think you do well? What do you think is important about doing it well?”

\textsuperscript{235} Sensing, 167.
2) What did your involvement in this research tell you about yourself and your formation as a United Church worship leader?

This written respondent validation, also known as a “member check” and referred to in this thesis as a “transcript review” (TR), verifies the data and increases the trustworthiness of the study. It also provides opportunity for interviewees to participate in the early stages of data analysis. The results of the interviews will be reported thematically in Chapter 6.

Once the transcript reviews were submitted by the interviewees, the first stage of the data analysis commenced: the identification of key words and phrases, and the organization of repeated themes. A summary of the data, including emerging questions, was distributed to the members of the focus group four days prior to their meeting, so that participants could review the data before joining the focus group on September 19, 2016.

4.7 The Focus Group

The focus group consisted of three alumni participants, an outside expert/note-taker, and myself as facilitator. The alumni participants represented different years of graduation, a 1:3 male:female ratio, as well as a range of age, experience in the UCC, and opinion on the questionnaire. Two of the alumni were present in person, and one joined the group via Skype. The outside expert (OE) chosen for the focus group was an experienced Formation Director from a different denomination who took hand-written notes during the meeting and presented her observations to the group.\footnote{Her affiliation with a non-UCC denomination and lack of participation in the UCC Formation program gave her ample distance to connect key comments, identify assumptions, and raise questions.} No audio or video recording was made of the daylong meeting.
The purpose of this group was to review the data to date and to continue the process of analysis and interpretation. During this meeting, participants were asked what they thought about topics in the data summary and what surprised them by its presence or absence. They were asked to further explore the process of formation, focusing on key factors of influence. They were asked to consider the recommendations for Formation worship offered by questionnaire respondents and interviewees and to add their own. Finally, they were asked to imagine metaphors or illustrations to depict the Formation process, as metaphors simplify, clarify, and summarize self-understanding.

The OE was also invited to identify any assumptions, missing information, or emerging questions she observed. Time was allowed for the alumni/ae to address what the guest OE identified. The focus group concluded with a question about what the participants might have learned about themselves and their formation through their participation in the research project.

4.8 Data Analysis

In order to “place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine it in a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate the interpretation to others,” the following plan to analyze the data was put in place:

Step 1: Read and reread the accumulated text, highlighting key words and phrases.
Step 2: Organize repeated issues, patterns, and themes, including acts, values, and attitudes.
Step 3: Identify “slippage,” that is, contradictions or divergence of data.

See Appendix F for the focus group questions. The results of the focus group will be reported in Chapter 7.

Sensing, 167.

Ibid., 194.

This plan is an adaptation from ibid., 148, 197.
Step 4: Identify silences, that is, what has been left unsaid because, for example, it was considered self-evident or unacceptable.

Step 5: Create a “thick” description of the phenomenon of formation for worship leadership. “What was done (act)? When or where was it done (scene)? Who did it (agent)? How did he or she do it (agency)? What was the reaction or emotional response (impact)? Why was it done (purpose)?”241

Step 6: Create a chart that establishes relationships of people, events, institutions, or decisions presented in the case.

Step 7: Consider the theoretical and theological resources already introduced in the thesis that would help to clarify the issues that emerge in the case.

Step 8: Draw conclusions and consider recommendations for program changes.

Attempts were made to work through all eight steps during the data analysis. Steps 1 through 4 are especially evident in the reporting of the questionnaires results in Chapter 5, but have been applied to all three vehicles for data gathering. Step 5 was applied to the stories shared in the interviews and is evident in the structure of the reporting of these stories in Chapter 6. In addition to the consideration of several visual images to represent a student’s formation for worship leadership, a diagram was created out of the interview stories (Step 6) and is presented in Chapter 8. Step 7, the consideration of theoretical and theological resources introduced in chapters 1 through 3, was applied in two ways. These scholarly resources were utilized as organizing frameworks for the presentation of the study data in chapters 5 through 7 and they were also engaged in dialogue with emerging themes from the research study in chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 9, the final chapter, is comprised of the conclusions that can be drawn from the study and consideration of recommendations for change, completing Step 8. These steps are not

241 Ibid., 148.
identified as such in the thesis, but their outcomes are embedded in the reporting of the study results which are organized thematically.

4.9 Ethical Implications

Care was taken throughout the study to address the ethical implications of the research project, the most significant of which was the perceived power differential between researcher and participant. As stated earlier, the study participants were recently ordained UCC graduates of AST. No formal power differential remains between the study participants and me since we are now colleagues in ordained ministry. However, although considered a low risk, there was a risk that a perceived power differential may still remain for the student if they had not yet made the shift in perspective to consider me as a colleague, especially since they were reflecting on their past experiences when I was their Formation Director and there was a power differential between us. Strategies were utilized to mitigate that risk, in order to give participants options to suit their comfort levels.

First, when the alumni were sent their invitations to participate, detailed information about the scope of the study, its goals, and the benefits of participating were included so that they could make an informed decision to participate. AST alumni are familiar with qualitative research methods, as each of these former students completed their own qualitative research project in their final year at AST. This was an advantage in introducing the project to potential participants. Each participant signed a consent form that outlined the purpose of the project; described the methods of data gathering (i.e. questionnaire, interview, transcript review, and focus group); ensured anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process with the use of a pseudonym and the removal of any personal identifying information; assured the participant of
the secure storage of all data gathered; and informed the participant he or she was free not to answer any question, or end his or her participation in the study at any time.\textsuperscript{242}

Secondly, those who chose to participate in the study were given the choice to fill in a questionnaire only or to also participate in an interview or the focus group. Participants were given the option to choose the location of their interview, if conducted in person, and by phone or Skype, if conducted from a distance. Despite these precautions, there was a small chance that the participants might feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or upset, if they anticipated that their answers might hurt my feelings or if memories of the past triggered uncomfortable emotions, for example. I did my best to set a tone that created a space of open and honest critical reflection. I also informed all the study participants that they could pass on answering any question and end the interview or their participation in the focus group at any time. No participant requested that their participation be truncated. If one had, plans were in place for a neutral support person to be available to offer pastoral care by telephone.

To comply with accepted research ethics protocols, all electronic data, including written questionnaires, recordings of interviews, and transcripts were stored on two encrypted data sticks. The data sticks and paper documents were stored in a locked metal firebox. All research data will be destroyed upon the successful defence of the thesis. The study proceeded with the consent of the University of Toronto Research Ethics Review Board. Their letter of approval can be found in Appendix C.

Although not an ethical issue, there was one final risk inherent to the study. Because of my role in the program under evaluation, there was also a risk that I might cloud the interview and focus group with my own needs, fears, and beliefs in such a way that would prevent me from hearing the message of the respondents clearly or prevent the interviewee from responding

\textsuperscript{242} See Appendix E for the Consent Form for Participants.
honestly. Therefore, care was taken in the design of the study to reduce this risk through the incorporation of strategies such as adding a written questionnaire, the review of transcripts by the interviewees, taking researcher field notes, and observation by an outside expert who is a non-UCC Formation Director.

4.10 Summary

In summary, a case study methodology was chosen for the qualitative research project as it is an effective methodology for the evaluation of a practice or program. Using the work of Sensing, a three-stage study was designed to include a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group. This triangulation of data collection methods was employed to increase the credibility of the study results. The participants in the study were UCC ministers who graduated from AST between 2011 and 2014. Through the opportunities afforded by the questionnaire, the interview, and the focus group, participants shared their experiences in the AST chapel and their understandings of the impact of these experiences on their current worship leadership. The data collected in the study was analyzed using the 8-step plan outlined above. Finally, ethical considerations concerning a possible perceived power differential between researcher and participant were addressed by giving participants options regarding methods of response, location of interview, and other factors. The results of the study are reported in Chapters 5 through 7.
Chapter 5
Questionnaire Results

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the first stage of the research project (the questionnaire) are reported thematically. Because the responses were so rich and diverse, the questionnaire responses were first organized according to repeated themes, contradictions in the data were identified, silences were noted, and then, in most cases, they were compared and contrasted with the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The first theme, the meaning and purpose of worship, is presented within Duck’s framework of five theological emphases for worship. The study results pertaining to worship that is specific to The United Church of Canada are compared with the idiom of ordered liberty and Caron’s eight principles of just worship. Next, we turn our attention to the study participants’ understandings of the purpose of the presider. These are reported using Long’s framework of eyes and ears, mouth, hands, feet, and heart. That which participants value in presiders is reported using two categories that emerged from the data: presence and presentation.

The impact of chapel worship on current worship practices is reported next, focusing specifically on knowledge gained, skills developed, and identity and spirituality formed. People, the learning environment, and God are reported as key factors that influenced participants’ formation in chapel worship. The impact of participants’ expectations of the theological school chapel on their formation experience is also outlined. Finally, the actual practice of ordered liberty is tested through a simple examination of the balance of original material, UCC materials, and non-UCC materials in participants’ current worship preparation.
5.2 Meaning and Purpose of Worship

Fifteen participants’ responses to the question “How would you express the meaning and purpose of worship?” were compared to Ruth Duck’s “five theological emphases in understanding worship.”

All five categories of ritual, revelation, response, relationship, and rehearsal were represented (unprompted) in the questionnaire responses, although some were favoured more than others. Only one alumna mentioned ritual explicitly in her definition of the meaning of worship as “an intentional focus on connecting with the Divine by way of ritual (word, song, prayer).” The revelatory nature of worship, in contrast to ritual, was more commonly expressed by the respondents. For Bea, the meaning and purpose of worship includes “[opening] ourselves to the presence of God to learn more about the way of Jesus.”

Worship as a response to God was also commonly represented. Words from Kay are reflective of this understanding: “Worship is an active spiritual, physical, and mental response to God. . . . It is meant to nurture our appreciation for grace given, and offer praise to the Triune God through sacraments, prayer, music, readings, creation, and silence.”

The understanding of worship as entering into relationship with God and others was clearly the most popular response. Chloe’s answer is representative of many of the questionnaires:

Worship is one of the ways in which we intentionally turn ourselves – our hearts, our minds, our lives – toward the Divine source of our being. Communal worship enables and empowers us to share life in God, whether we’re feeling grateful and can’t help but sing our joy or our hearts are heavy and we need to weep together. The act and space of worshipping together reminds us that our God is a relational God and that being in right relationship with God, one another, and all creation is vital to our wellbeing . . . we are

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243 For the purpose of this research project, meaning was defined as “essence of,” and purpose was defined as “goal of.”

244 Duck, 7-16.

245 Amy Q1 (italics added).
not alone (nor meant to be alone)!

A smaller, but significant, group articulated an understanding of worship as rehearsal, “a way of practising love, justice, and peace in preparation for life in the world.” As one participant put it, “We, as a family in faith, make up the Body of Christ in the world. We are His hands and feet, our gifts being the unique parts that make up the Body, and the Spirit being the life-force that activates us according to our gifts . . . ” It may be a bit surprising that comments capturing the understanding of worship as rehearsal are not found more often in the questionnaire responses. The United Church of Canada has a firm grounding in the Social Gospel movement and remains intensely interested in social justice today. Preparation and rehearsal for being agents of social justice might well be expected as one of the key purposes of worship among United Church students. Could it be that the small degree of connection with this notion among interviewees is a result of taking this aspect of their denominational identity for granted? Is it a significant departure from it? Or is the language of worship as rehearsal simply missing from their liturgical vocabulary?

There was a sixth category of responses that I have labeled (borrowing from Amy’s words) the “recharging of spiritual batteries.” Six people described the purpose of worship to be, at least in part, “sending us out refreshed and empowered.” While this understanding of worship is similar to Duck’s description of ritual in that it is anthropocentric, I do not believe that it is the same as Duck’s understanding of ritual as rites that aid in the creation of meaning for individuals and communities.

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246 Duck, 14.
247 Gail Q1.
248 Amy Q1.
249 Ivy Q1.
The understanding of worship as the recharging of spiritual batteries is consistent with E. Byron Anderson’s observation of his students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. In his experience, students expect that worship “should express ‘my’ faith and belief” and that they “pick and choose” worship options “from which they believe they will most likely ‘get’ something.”\(^{250}\) What the respondents “get” at AST is spiritual refreshment. This is certainly a wonderful effect of participation in worship, but is it the purpose of worship?\(^{251}\) The understanding of the purpose of worship as the recharging of personal spiritual batteries could be indicative of the influence of contemporary cultural trends toward individualism and consumerism, or a desire for a spiritual connection that energizes one for faithful action.

In summary, questionnaire respondents expressed the meaning and purpose of worship as ritual action; as revelation of God to the gathered community; as the community’s response to God in praise and thanksgiving; as enriching the congregation’s relationship with God, the community, and the wider world; as rehearsal for acting as the Body of Christ in the world; and as the recharging of congregants’ spiritual batteries. These theological understandings of worship set the stage for the next theme: UCC worship.

### 5.3 United Church Worship

When asked what faithful United Church worship looks like, the alumni/ae offered wide-ranging suggestions. These were collated thematically and then placed within the frameworks of Caron’s characteristics of “just” worship and the UCC concept of “ordered liberty,” which Kervin has described as a dynamic dialectic characteristic of all United Church worship. There

\(^{250}\) Anderson, 160, 161.

\(^{251}\) Members of the Focus Group suggested that perhaps the “recharging the spiritual batteries” should be understood more as a “happy by-product” of worship rather than its purpose.
is evidence of five of Caron’s eight characteristics in the research data, as well as ordered liberty.\textsuperscript{252}

Consistent with Caron’s category of “truth-telling,” UCC worship was described as “theologically thoughtful,” “thought provoking,” and “challenging” (of theological assumptions, broadening one’s awareness and practice of discipleship). “Community-building,” “welcoming,” “supporting and strengthening the Body of Christ,” were also popular descriptions of UCC worship. These terms align with Caron’s “construction of community” and the respondents’ understanding of worship as relationship. One participant said that “[UCC worship] is doing the best service for God one can do so that congregants feel their needs are being met – that they are growing closer to God, and developing a deeper relationship with God and with others.”\textsuperscript{253}

Caron’s category of “inclusion of diversity” is also well represented in the data. Respondents describe UCC worship as “non-judgmental,” “accepting of diversity,” and “inclusive” (e.g. “inclusive in its language, expansive in how we refer to the Holy, and embracing of those who seek the table, regardless of their journey through life”). The understanding of alumni/ae regarding the inclusion of diversity is in some ways broader than Caron’s. Alumni/ae also name the diversity of congregational and regional context: “[W]hat faithful United Church worship looks like here may and probably does take a different form in a neighbouring community.”\textsuperscript{254} Throughout the study, participants mentioned their surprise at the breadth of diversity among their student colleagues at AST.

\textsuperscript{252} Caron, 130-135. Cf. “In every generation, order and liberty, catholicity and particularity, continue to inform and shape each other in ongoing interaction in the creation of something new, yet something still connected to the familiar.” William S. Kervin, “Dialectic,” 332.

\textsuperscript{253} Joy Q2.

\textsuperscript{254} Otis Q2.
Study participants also described UCC worship as “affirming,” “loving, open,” and “hospitable.” These characteristics advance Caron’s “creation of healthy self-esteem,” which she describes as knowing that we are created in the image of God and are loved by God, which in turn empowers us to consider others’ well-being.\textsuperscript{255}

Mission, an important category in Caron’s understanding of “just” worship, is also well-articulated in the questionnaire responses.\textsuperscript{256} Lee’s offering is representative: “[UCC worship is] social justice oriented. It begins and ends with God and reflects the call of Christ to be people of action in the world, seeking justice, resisting evil, and living with respect in creation. I believe the words of the New Creed in its entirety accurately reflect what faithful worship should be.”\textsuperscript{257} Surprisingly, there is no mention in this section of the participation of the whole people of God in planning and leading worship, which relates to Caron’s fourth principle of “just” worship. However, it is frequently mentioned in the study participants’ comments on presiding, which I report below.

Several responses connect directly or indirectly to the concept of “ordered liberty” in UCC worship. Hal’s response most clearly expresses the connection: “[Faithful United Church worship is] honouring the traditions of the ages (not just United Church traditions but the many traditions that came before it). It is that, and, it is about new ways of worship too, recognizing that the Spirit is continually at work, revealing itself in new ways, new expressions, new facets. The blend of this old and new is United Church worship (for me!).” Other dynamics named by

\textsuperscript{255} Caron, 134.

\textsuperscript{256} Two of Caron’s other categories, survival (that we and the world should live in peace, wholeness and justice) and compassion (worship involves the whole person, work is the essence of worship), are not mentioned specifically in the alumni/ae responses. However, their meanings are difficult to separate from the broader category of mission. For the purposes of this thesis, I have grouped these three characteristics under the title of “mission.”

\textsuperscript{257} Lee Q2.
participants include “contemporary, but reverent and respectful” and “joyful, but also leaving space for silence and lament.”

Finally, alumni/ae also described UCC worship as “biblical,” “Triune God-centered,” and “Christocentric.” In a time when worship is under pressure to change in the UCC, some alumni/ae felt it important to name these as essential to our denominational worship expressions. In summary, study participants describe faithful UCC worship as inclusive, welcoming, affirming, community-building, celebratory and challenging, traditional and contemporary, contextual, social justice oriented, biblical, and Christocentric.

5.4 Purpose of the Worship Presider

As I argued earlier, the worship presider employs his or her heart, soul, mind, and strength in planning for and presiding at worship. The participants’ responses to the question, “What is the purpose of the presider as worship planner and leader?” elicited a broad range of understandings. As a result, I have chosen to summarize the alumni/ae statements on the purpose of the presider under the categories suggested by Kimberley Bracken Long and introduced in Chapter 3: eyes and ears, mouth, hands and feet, and heart. These categories provide a helpful tool for organizing and presenting the data, as well as identifying any silences in the data.

5.4.1 Eyes and Ears

According to the study participants, the presider’s purpose begins with listening for God’s guidance, recognizing the planning team’s gifts and empowering them to use them, and attending to the context of the worshipping community. Amy wrote that the purpose of the worship planner is “to remain mindful of context of community, and to design/tailor liturgy that brings God’s story to life in that particular context.” The presider then thoughtfully and

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258 Bea Q2.
collaboratively shapes liturgy that is “shared amongst those who wish to participate and lead,” and “provides a space where congregants might acknowledge the Holy Spirit in their midst and engage that same Spirit in prayer and praise.”

5.4.2 Mouth

As Ministers of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, respondents identified speech as key to a presider’s purpose. He or she uses words that are “understandable, accessible,” to the congregation, and that “move people of different ages into deeper relationship with God and with God’s creation.” The presider shares the Word of God in a way that helps parishioners hear the good news of the gospel proclaimed in the witness of the life, teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; that helps them feel the call to glorify God and to respond to God and their neighbours because of this gift; and that reminds those in attendance “that they are part of a love story deeply embedded in ancient history that continues to unfold with them, and will continue for generations to come.” Connecting to a central theme reflective of the church season through music, prayer, and message was also identified as a key purpose of the presider. The presider then speaks with a tone and delivery that is consistent with the theme of the service, guiding “the rhythm of the liturgy to make space for community to experience a meaningful connection with God.”

5.4.3 Hands and Feet

The hymn, “Christ Has No Body Now But Yours,” based on words of St. Teresa of Avila, begins “Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours. Here on this earth, yours

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259 Ivy Q3, Otis Q3.
260 Ivy Q3, Meg Q3.
261 Meg Q3, Nora Q3.
262 Amy Q3.
is the work to serve with the joy of compassion.” The study results reveal that another purpose of the presider is to convey God’s compassion. The presider facilitates worship in ways that express welcome, caring, and acceptance.

Thus another key role of the presider is to encourage the body of Christ to be the hands and feet of Christ for the world. The presider does this first by connecting God’s Word to their living today. In Long’s “feet” category were the worship space itself, movement through that space, and movement from the worship space to the world. With reference to the space itself, atmosphere and visuals were named by a respondent as factors that (alongside prayers and the sermon) help people to “feel the (sometimes very disorienting) deep love of God . . .”

Making connections between what we do in worship and what God calls us to do in the world was a key concern for many of the questionnaire respondents. Phrases such as “guide them . . . so that they can then leave and spread [God’s] story outside the church walls,” “encourage and empower the community in its Christian life and practice,” “help people to continue to grow and become all that God wants us to be,” and “enliven the mission of God’s church by facilitating leadership and participation amongst lay members of the congregation” were employed to underline the importance of this purpose for presiders.

5.4.4 Heart

Long’s understanding of presiding from the heart includes five essential practices. The first is guiding congregants through the rhythm or flow of the service. This practice was held up as a

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264 Finn Q3, Joy Q3, for example.

265 Hal Q3.

266 Nora Q3, Bea Q3, Joy Q3, and Lee Q3 respectively.
key purpose of the presider in the questionnaire responses. In the words of Amy, the purpose of the liturgist is in part to “guid[e] the rhythm of the liturgy to make space for community to experience a meaningful connection with God.”

Long’s practice of giving the service over to God was also echoed in the questionnaires. Respondents named the presider’s purpose as “allow[ing] God to be the leader. . . be[ing] a vessel of grace,” and “lead[ing] by the Holy Spirit.”267 Bringing one’s authentic self to worship, Long’s fourth practice of the heart, was also named as a key purpose of the presider.268

The questionnaire respondents’ understandings of the role of presider are generally consistent with Long’s categories of embodied presiding. The study participants described the purpose of the presider as collaboratively planning and leading worship in ways that seek guidance from God and give the service over to God; encourage others to participate in planning and leading worship according to their gifts; and are accessible to and respond to the needs of the community. Worship planning and leadership also needs to welcome and care for the community; move people into deeper relationships with God and God’s creation; guide the rhythm of the liturgy to make space for meaningful connections with the Divine; and reveal God’s Word in ways that connect to people’s contemporary experience. The presider’s work must also acknowledge the presence of the Spirit in worship and daily living; be coherent thematically; and enliven the mission of the church.

However, there is one notable exception. Nothing was mentioned of the sacraments and other liturgical acts that employ touch and hand gestures in the questionnaires. As all the respondents are ordained Ministers of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, this absence is significant.

267 Ivy Q3, Kay Q3.

268 Amy Q3, for example.
5.5 What Do You Value in a Worship Presider?

The responses to question 4 (“How would you describe yourself as worship planner and leader today?”), question 5a (“What do you value in a worship presider?”), and question 5b (“Where do these values come from?”) have been grouped together to report on what study participants value in a worship presider and from where these values have arisen. After organizing the data according to repeated phrases and themes, I assembled the responses using the categories of presence and presentation. Although there is overlap between the two categories, as a rule “presence” pertains to the presider’s being or attributes. These values relate to the presider’s identity and spirituality. “Presentation” focuses on action and included values related to the presider’s knowledge and skill.

5.5.1 Presence

In terms of presence, the most commonly held values were authenticity (reflecting the “real self” and not “put on”) and collaboration (including involving lay leaders, children and youth.) The next most commonly-held values were servant-like humility and passionate engagement. Gail wrote, “I describe myself as confident but humble in my role. I am aware that I am a member leading other members of our worship family, and that I am using my gifts and my calling to help the whole of our family/Body of Christ.”269 Chloe shared, “I like the term ‘worship animator.’”270

The next set of values are having a relaxed and open manner; love for congregation made evident by welcome, warmth, hospitality, kindness, love, and compassion; non-judgemental acceptance and respect for all peoples; a strong relationship with God and

269 Gail Q4.

270 Chloe Q5a.
prayerfulness that looks for direction and guidance from God; creativity; sense of humour; and conscientiousness. Also named were curiosity, sensitivity/tact, openness (to God and to others, to the Spirit’s movement), flexibility, playfulness, risk-taking, hopefulness, reverence, commitment, thoughtfulness, and an ability to be a historian, prophet, and lover.

5.5.2 Presentation

The most commonly-held value for a presider’s presentation, by far, was employing good communication skills including clear enunciation, care with words, and use of accessible language. Next were strong teaching/storytelling/preaching skills. The study participants valued the interpretation of scripture in a way that is “God-focused,” timely, engaging, and relevant to the congregation. Ivy values “[s]omeone who is able to pick out the grace and trouble in a text. Someone who gives me a nugget of theological gum to chew on for the rest of the week. I like inspiring speakers.”271 Respondents also valued careful attention to theme and detail so that all elements of the service tie together, theologically and liturgically, and flow smoothly from one element to another.

Alumni/ae value a great range of other characteristics and habits in worship presiders: giving worshippers a variety of ways to engage God; knowledgeable preparation; challenging worshippers to live into a vision; and attempting to push the boundaries of worshippers to help them think critically about their faith. Other important characteristics and habits are speaking about difficult issues; creating a service that honours God and provides a sense of sanctuary; offering times of silence and reflection to balance with joy-filled, energized times; using gender neutral language; and the ability to be age inclusive. In addition, the ability to think on one’s feet; use appropriate music; and get their eyes off the page to really connect with the

271 Ivy Q5a.
congregation through eye contact and body movement were named as important. Otis wrote that it is also important to open oneself to the Spirit’s movement (i.e. an ability to go with the flow, even if it leads in unexpected and unscripted directions). As he put it, “A child shouting, ‘Yay, Jesus,’ might be just what the Holy Spirit called for, and that burst of joy shouldn’t be ignored.”

5.5.3 Sources of Values

The participants most commonly credit their worship attendance over the years as the source for learning the characteristics and habits they value in presiders. They have observed these through the witness of ministers in their home congregations, on their Supervised Field Education sites, internship sites, and at AST. Other sources for their values as presiders include their theological understandings of a loving God and of liturgy as “a performance for the sake of the Holy;” previous team experience in the business world; standards set in theological school; family; individual personality, talents, and gifts; and the congregation they currently serve.

In summary, the study participants reported a wide range of values in their presiding, the most common of which are authenticity; collaboration; humility; passion; good communication skills; strong storytelling skills; biblical interpretation that is timely, engaging, and relevant to the congregation; and careful attention to both theme and flow of the service. Most commonly, the study participants felt that all the presiders they had previously observed informed their values for presiders.

5.6 Impact of Chapel Worship on Current Worship Leadership

As we might expect, when participants responded to the question, “How did your experiences attending, planning, leading and reflecting on Wednesday afternoon UCC
Formation worship inform your current worship leadership?” their answers were rich and varied. To demonstrate the range of responses, a representative sample is presented below.

Leading worship at AST for peers and faculty helped me develop both a sense of confidence in my abilities and a deep respect for every congregation.273

I remember, at AST, during busy or difficult times, thinking that worship was a time to rest, to be present with God, to relate with others in a positive way, even if there were conflicts happening, for example. I suppose I still keep this in mind as I plan worship now.274

I found the feedback from peers and faculty helpful but I found being asked to offer feedback even more helpful. There was accountability in how I was entering into worship, not just between me and God but a need to be able to express myself and my understanding of others in a coherent manner. This forced me to look at my own efforts as worship leader not as a performer but as a real expression of who I am in God’s world. I found our times of worship with communion some of the most moving sharing of the sacrament I have ever experienced. The intimacy and closeness of community no doubt contributed to this.275

It was good practice. We saw the good, bad, and ugly and still loved each other through our successes and foibles.276

Attending worship gave a sense of community involving the whole of the AST student body. The community spirit was uplifting, inspirational, and felt warmly supportive – it was a time of sharing not only the worship liturgy and message, but also socially prior to and following the service itself. This atmosphere was one that any leader would want to have as a foundation block for worship.277

Each week we would also get to see different leadership styles from classmates who were in charge of leadership for that day. Over the three years I was a participant in Formation, I was able to get a good sense of the type of leader I wanted to be when I saw how others led.278

273 Amy Q6.
274 Bea Q6.
275 Deb Q6.
276 Ivy Q6.
277 Joy Q6.
278 Lee Q6.
Leading worship and preaching in front of peers and professors is the most stressful thing of life. Once you get through leading worship with 20-30 of your classmates, a 600 people-in-attendance-packed-to-rafters-Christmas Eve service in a congregation is a picnic. Seriously. Even when you know you’re all in the same boat and doing the same thing and it’s someone else’s turn the next week, it’s still anxiety-inducing. But in a good way, because I have never once since AST felt nervous before any worship service, marriage or funeral.279

In just this small sampling, we see that participating in chapel worship has given these respondents increased confidence, a clearer understanding of the kind of worship leader they hoped to be, a sense of their role as an agent of the Spirit, a vision of the kind of atmosphere they would like to encourage in their future congregation’s life together, and increased compassion and respect for their future congregations.

Alumni/ae reported that their worship experiences on Wednesday afternoons could, at various points, be any of the following: frustrating, enlightening, moving, scary, comforting, challenging, adventurous, eye-opening, disheartening, uplifting, inspirational, and formative in some way.280 Recognizing that Wednesday afternoon worship was one of many experiences that shaped them as worship leaders, they were still able to produce long lists of knowledge they gained, skills they developed, and ways that their identity and spirituality as a worship leader were shaped. Borrowing from the definition of formation postulated by the authors of Educating Clergy presented in Chapter 3, the questionnaire asked the respondents to narrow their focus to these categories: “During your experiences in chapel worship at AST, what new knowledge or insights did you gain? What skills did you develop? How was your identity and spirituality as a

279 Nora Q6.

280 Given the perpetual interest among AST students in innovation in worship, it is interesting that in all the data collected, the word “boring” was never used to describe their experiences of worship.
worship leader shaped?" I turn now to the study participants’ responses to these three questions.

5.6.1 Knowledge Gained

Respondents reported learning respect for a great variety of worship traditions and practices in the UCC and beyond, including various ways of conducting the sacraments and traditional and contemporary worship forms; appreciation for a broad library of liturgical resources, including communion liturgy resources, UCC music resources; UCC theology, history, and ethos; and an appreciation of their denomination’s gifts. They learned the importance of engaging scripture; the importance of working with a theme in worship; and the importance of congregational participation and involvement, given that liturgy is the work of the people. For one student, Wednesday afternoon worship was an opportunity to integrate learning from her other classes, pulpit supply, Field Education, and internship.

Participants learned many practical things such as the challenge of acoustics; the value of colour, hangings, symbols, and a well-designed bulletin; small details, such as when worshippers sit or stand – “all those little things that you pick up intuitively by doing it again and again. They are small and unspoken but can make such a difference.”

On Wednesday afternoons, they learned sensitivity to the pastoral needs of others, to the diversity of theologies, and to the range of ways that people engage the Divine. Through the observation of peers, they learned different styles of worship and worship leadership, and that “just to do something different didn’t ensure [success.]”

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281 Questions 7a, 7b, and 7c of the questionnaire. For the full text of the questionnaire see Appendix F.

282 Hal I6a.

283 Meg Q7a.
Respondents also learned about themselves. One learned to step out of her comfort zone and allow herself to be creative; another learned that her education would be life-long, since AST was just the beginning. One student learned to ask herself: “How is the service I am planning likely to be received by the congregation? Am I offering the best I can offer? Is there a balance between comfort and challenge? Will the congregation go home not feeling as though they just wasted an hour of their lives?”

Just one student reported that she did not gain new knowledge, skills, or greater understanding of her identity or spirituality in this setting. Meg stated, “It wasn’t learning. It was going through the motions. It was repetitive. It was more repetitive than it was a learning experience for me.” We will hear more from her in the reporting of the interview results.

5.6.2 Skills Developed

Questionnaire responses regarding the development of skills ranged from “ALL OF THE SKILLS!” to “the basics,” to “what not to do” and “not really any.” Again, study participants shared a long list of skills that were strengthened in Wednesday afternoon worship. Most frequently reported was how to craft liturgy that serves the needs of the people, including “really thinking about each part of the service and how they flow together,” developing a theme throughout the service with complementary components, being mindful of length, and balancing prayer, scripture, and music. Many respondents also highlighted learning how to collaborate respectfully and effectively in worship planning while “encouraging creativity,” “maintaining one’s own voice,” and “listening to and hearing people’s needs and suggestions.”

Participants developed presiding skills such as speaking confidently, clearly, slowly and distinctly; writing and offering prayers, including extemporaneous prayers; embodying a calm,

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284 Amy Q6.

285 Meg I6a.
confident presence during rituals; and using liturgical gestures. They developed their preaching skills through the creation of sermons that interpreted scripture and applied a message relevant to today, “speaking God’s Word, recognizing God within and acknowledging God’s presence in varied situations.”

Examples of other worship planning skills respondents named are how to “exegete” the congregation; looking ahead on the calendar and planning blocks at a time; seeking guidance from God before planning; thorough researching and attending to the risk of plagiarism; making bulletins; communicating with musicians; using colour as a dramatic and educational tool; and involving others in the service. Amy also developed skills for evaluating worship through her chapel experiences. She currently uses the “prepare/execute/reflect model (What worked the way I hoped? What didn’t? What will I do differently next time?)” that she practised at AST.

5.6.3 Identity and Spirituality Shaped

Although the respondents wrote more in this section of the questionnaire than the knowledge and skills sections, it is the most difficult to summarize as the respondents approached the question (“How was your identity and spirituality as a worship leader shaped?”) from many directions. Some interpreted the question as an opportunity to talk about the means of their development as a worship leader beyond Wednesday Worship. Others described their understanding of their identity/spirituality as a worship leader, as the question intended. Again, cautions were issued by one student. Meg wrote, “I don’t think it was. I separated worship experience from a learning experience. My spirituality was shaped only to the extent that all

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286 Joy Q7b.

287 Amy Q6.
experiences shape it.”\textsuperscript{288} Meg went on to say in her interview, “Just by having an experience over and over again you are shaped somewhat. But I can’t say it transformed me.”\textsuperscript{289}

Despite these cautions, study participants shared that through their participation in Wednesday worship they learned a great deal in terms of their identity and spirituality, such as a deeper understanding of worship as offering; how to let go of their own preoccupations and let God speak; how to embrace the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit; and that “worship isn’t something that I plan and deliver – but something worshippers and worship leaders create together with the inspiration of the Holy.”\textsuperscript{290}

Through their experiences in Wednesday worship, respondents reported gaining more confidence to bring their authentic self to worship and accept their spiritual gifts; finding their “confident voice;” and expressing their spirituality in actions and words. They learned to trust their instincts as a leader, to trust the Spirit’s guidance in responding to the community’s needs, and to be honest with themselves in assessing their abilities and teamwork. They became more compassionate and caring toward other students. They gained self-awareness of their own worship preferences and learned how to bring their authentic self into leadership without imposing their personal preferences on others. They developed a “deep respect for every congregation” and discovered a sense of adventure for worship.

Ivy’s statement, “Mentorship is powerful in chapel,” is a commonly held position amongst the respondents. Many of them mentioned chapel as a place to experiment with a variety of ways of being in worship. They watched the varied approaches of other people

\textsuperscript{288} Meg Q7c.

\textsuperscript{289} Meg I6c.

\textsuperscript{290} Otis Q7c.
(primarily students, but also staff, faculty, and guests) and the ways they stood, spoke, wore vestments, and so on, then considered those approaches for themselves.

In summary, with the exception of one respondent, study participants identified a variety of ways that they were shaped as worship leaders in the AST chapel. They gained knowledge about UCC worship tradition and liturgical resources, for example. Participants also developed skills, including collaborating in worship planning, crafting liturgy that flows smoothly from one element to the next, speaking confidently, writing prayers, creating bulletins, and using liturgical gestures. Their identities and spiritualties as presiders were also shaped as they gained the confidence to bring their authentic selves to their worship leadership, and as they learned to entrust the worship service to God. Next we turn our attention to the factors that influenced the study participants’ learning in the AST chapel.

5.7 Influences on Student Formation for Worship Leadership

When asked to what or to whom they credit the development of their knowledge, skill, identity, and spirituality in chapel worship, the questionnaire respondents named people, the learning environment, and God as influential on their formation as a worship leader.

Fellow students were the most common group of people named as influences. Students influenced each other in a variety of ways. They mentored and learned from each other (including “what to do” and “what not to do”), they offered encouragement and support to one another, they shared ideas for worship content, and they deepened each other’s understandings of the broad spectrum of theology, culture, and worship traditions within The United Church of Canada. Professors were also identified as influential to respondents’ growth, not only because of their guidance, affirmation, and mentorship, but also their presence in worship, which motivated them to be more diligent in their scholarship and preparation for worship. Other
influencers were mentors, the Formation Director, Supervised Field Education site supervisors and congregants, chaplains, musicians, and worship leaders in their home congregations.

Atlantic School of Theology was considered influential as it “provides an academic and practical program that gives students a rich experience.” Aspects of the learning environment of Wednesday worship were also mentioned. The context of UCC Formation was described as a place with a “kind, warm, accepting atmosphere” that “allowed me to lean into constructive criticism rather than putting up defensive roadblocks” and “encouraged creativity, growth and change.” Joy continued,

For learning to result in maximum change and growth (in other words development of humans), people require an environment conducive to bringing change about through an inviting, accepting, and caring atmosphere without obvious judgment. Formation class did this – it was inclusive, the director appeared to have a personal relationship with all in an attempt to get to know and understand each student. This I believe is the success of any teaching environment – Formation was a community who experienced unconditional acceptance and spirituality together.

Deb reported that she found feedback from peers and faculty helpful but being asked to offer feedback even more helpful, as it focused her attention more fully on the service itself and her communication of her experience. Finally, four respondents acknowledged prayer and their relationship with God as very influential to their development as a worship leader.

5.8 Expectations of the Theological School Chapel

In order to explore the possible influence of respondents’ expectations for the theological school chapel on their formation as worship leaders, the alumni/ae were introduced

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291 Lee Q8.
292 Joy Q8.
293 Joy Q8.
294 Deb, Gail, Lee, and Meg Q8.
to three of the models presented in *Common Worship in Theological Education* for understanding the theological school chapel: research laboratory, spiritual practice, and Sunday worship best practices.\(^295\) The research laboratory model encourages lots of experimentation and assumes that students will learn from their resulting successes and failures through evaluation. Proponents of theological school chapel worship as spiritual practice advocate for the experience of communal worship without evaluation. The third model promotes chapel worship as an opportunity to model excellent Sunday congregational worship practices. The study participants were invited to describe their understanding, choosing one or more of these models or suggesting one of their own.

Four respondents preferred the research laboratory model, describing creative experimentation, risk-taking, stretching oneself, and evaluation as essential to the formation process. Ivy used these words to express her understanding: “It is like a lab and I think this is necessary. Allowing students to evaluate empowered us for critical thinking in worship.”\(^296\)

Embracing the laboratory model freed students to experiment. Lee wrote:

> I felt as though I could experiment with different worship styles and be creative with my leadership style when I was leading in chapel. I knew that if there was something that was a success or a failure I would receive the appropriate feedback for it. I also took the opportunity to learn from the feedback given to me and used this to improve my leadership style and shape my spirituality over my time at AST.\(^297\)

One student who embraced this model expected of others the same interest in risk-taking and experimentation that she had: “In attending worship, I was pleased when some students ‘risked’ and I regretted the missed opportunity when others seemed to ‘play it safe.’” However, to be fair, I recognize that perhaps some students who were new to worship leadership needed to become

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\(^{295}\) See Garrigan and Johnson.

\(^{296}\) Ivy Q9.

\(^{297}\) Lee Q9.
comfortable with the ‘norm’ before they could develop the courage to experiment.”298 One respondent wished that there had been more opportunity for peer feedback. He would have appreciated time to debrief worship each week beyond the feedback forms.299 Nora asserted that worship can still be worshipful for both the student leading and the congregation while they are being evaluated on content and presentation, all the while learning from their successes and failures.300

Three respondents chose the metaphor of chapel worship as spiritual practice. Only one of these three rejected feedback as a welcome part of the worship experience. She wrote:

[T]heological school chapel is like a church. So, in that sense it was a group spiritual practice. For me it was where I went to worship God. I reject the image of it as a research laboratory and therefore I did not see feedback as something I desired. . . . I was more of a worshipper than a student when I was in chapel so perhaps I wasn’t as open to being formed by it or to learn from it. I was able to focus on God, but not so much on me.301

Chloe described chapel as an opportunity to develop a habit of daily devotion, and while rejecting evaluation of ecumenical services (the services held on weekdays other than Wednesdays), she asserted that weekly denominational worship is the space for experimentation and honing best practices. “In the weekly denominational setting, I greatly appreciated the opportunity to step outside the box,” she wrote, “and to learn from classmates in that space.”302

Gail also thinks that theological school chapel worship is “optimally a spiritual practice,” and
also asserts that it can be “reflected on prayerfully in order to help leaders explore/grow their gifts. If done right, this reflection can be like a spiritual practice in itself.”

Just one respondent chose the model of best practices. Finn described it as a “practice session before a big game.” While at AST this understanding of chapel worship helped him to be more at peace with making mistakes which has filtered into his current worship practice. “I don’t believe God is upset with me if I skip something in the order of service by accident or if I mess up the wording or a particular prayer or my sermon. That I am devoting my time to worshipping God is what I believe matters.”

Four study participants argued for more than one model, claiming that attending and leading chapel services is beneficial to the learning process and to one’s spirituality and faith. It helped them to “understand their successes and failures, and form their theological identities.” Emma wrote, “chapel was a great place to watch, learn, and actually allow my skills and talents to become a part of who I am.” Joy resonated with all three scenarios. Although leaning toward “opportunity to model excellent congregational worship,” Bea also thinks it is an important spiritual practice and she thinks it is helpful to evaluate it.

The final three alumni/ae offered original understandings. Theological school chapel worship is “time to be United Church in an ecumenical community,” “a team exercise that

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303 Gail Q9.
304 Finn Q9. For Finn, the "big game" was Sunday worship on his Supervised Field Education site.
305 Finn Q9.
306 Emma Q9.
307 Lee Q9.
308 Emma Q9.
309 Deb Q9.
was not necessarily a relevant opportunity for congregational experience,“ and “an experience in widening our worship vision.” With this latter understanding, Otis went into worship with “eyes wide open” that he might see what the Holy Spirit had to teach him through his colleagues. In Wednesday worship, he experienced the width and breadth of the “ordered liberty” of the United Church, and on the other days of the week (when worshipping with the broader ecumenical community of AST) he was “inspired by different traditions and found respect for different practices.”

The study participants were divided in their metaphorical expressions of the theological school chapel. Some expected it to be like a learning lab where experiments were performed and then learned from. Some expected it to be primarily a group spiritual practice, although only one respondent that chose this model asserted that worship should not be evaluated. One chose the model of chapel as model church. Some chose a combination of these three models and three additional models were proposed: a time to be unabashedly UCC in an ecumenical community; a team exercise that was not necessarily relevant to future congregational ministry; and an opportunity to widen worship vision. Nora pointed out in her response that whether or not evaluation is expected or encouraged, it is always happening informally. But she doesn’t consider it a negative. She wrote, “We all knew directly or indirectly, evaluations were happening when it was our turn to lead worship. But that didn’t take away from the ‘worshipfulness’ of the experience. In fact, the things that ‘worked’ and resonated with other

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310 Kay Q9.
311 Otis Q9.
312 Otis Q9.
313 Nora Q9.
students could later be repeated in a congregational setting, ultimately benefitting future congregations!”

5.9 Sources of Authority for Crafting Liturgy

In Question 10, the study participants were asked to identify what percentage of the material they used to plan worship in the previous month was original to them, what percentage was from UCC sources, and what percentage was from non-UCC sources. This question was designed to discover the authorities the participants consult in planning and leading worship and to gauge how alumni/ae might live out the concept of ordered liberty in their regular worship leadership. Participants were asked to indicate which resources they had utilized in their worship preparation, excluding those used for sermon writing. The results are depicted in the graph below.

Figure 1: Percentage of original material, UCC resources, and non-UCC sources utilized in the participant’s previous four weeks of worship
As the graph above illustrates, two respondents seem to prefer order to liberty, using no original material in their worship services the previous four weeks. At the other end of the spectrum are two alumni/ae who used 80 to 85% material that was original to them. For the remainder of the participants, the use of original material ranged from 10 to 50%, indicating a consistent commitment to the concept of ordered liberty.

The question that this graph raises for me is “What kind of balance between order and liberty should be pursued by faithful and effective United Church worship leaders?” All the respondents except one used at least some UCC resources in their worship planning. The most common UCC sources for worship preparation were: The United Church of Canada’s print and online resource, *Gathering: Resources for Worship Planners*; the two current UCC hymn books, *Voices United* and *More Voices*; the current UCC book of services, *Celebrate God’s Presence*; and Sunday School curricula.\(^{314}\) *Feasting on the Word*,\(^{315}\) the popular ecumenical commentary and worship companion, and the website “The Text this Week,”\(^{316}\) were the most commonly used non-UCC materials. Although not UCC-created, both textweek.com and *Feasting on the Word* are promoted on the UCC website.

Although most study participants employ a balance of original material, UCC resources, and non-UCC resources in their worship planning, the question of whether their balance is indicative of the UCC dynamic of ordered liberty remains unanswered because the results do not indicate how the materials were utilized in the planning process and integrated into the


worship services. The respondents’ understanding of ordered liberty will be revisited in Chapter 8.

5.10 Summary

In this chapter, information relevant to the study gathered from the questionnaires has been examined. Patterns of overlap have been identified and presented according to the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapters 2 and 3, namely Duck’s theological understandings of worship; Caron’s eight characteristics of just worship; the UCC concept of ordered liberty; Long’s work on presiding; metaphors for chapel worship identified by North American Deans of theological school chapels and professors of worship; and the characteristic categories of education of clergy – knowledge gained, skills developed, and identity and spirituality shaped. Areas of silence and discord have also been noted. Both emerging themes and emerging questions concerning the formation of UCC worship leaders in the AST chapel have been presented. From this analysis, the following initial insights have emerged:

1) The respondents communicated varied and rich theological understandings of the meaning and purpose of worship that encompassed ritual, revelatory, responsive, relational, and rehearsal aspects of worship for acting as the Body of Christ in the world, as well as an additional category of “recharging congregants’ spiritual batteries.”

2) Respondents describe UCC worship as inclusive, welcoming, affirming, community-building, celebratory and challenging, traditional and contemporary, contextual, social justice oriented, biblical, and Christocentric.

3) The questionnaire respondents describe the role of the presider in terms that are generally consistent with Long’s categories of embodied presiding. The purpose of
the presider is to collaboratively plan and lead worship that is accessible to and responds to the needs of the community, moves people into deeper relationships with God and God’s creation, and enlivens the mission of the church, while seeking guidance from God and giving the service over to God. The presider welcomes and cares for the community; guides the rhythm of the liturgy to make space for meaningful connections with the Divine; reveals God’s Word in ways that connect to people’s contemporary experience; and acknowledges the presence of the Spirit in worship and daily living.

4) Respondents value presiders’ authenticity, collaboration, humility, passion, good communication skills, strong storytelling skills, biblical interpretation that is timely, engaging and relevant to the congregation, and careful attention to both the theme and flow of the service. Study participants named that the presiders they had previously observed had informed their values.

5) Study participants described their chapel experiences in both positive and negative terms. With the exception of one respondent, they recognized that Wednesday afternoon worship was one of the experiences that shaped them as worship leaders. They produced long lists of knowledge they gained (e.g. UCC worship traditions and liturgical resources), skills they developed (e.g. creating bulletins, writing prayers and using liturgical gestures), and ways that their identity and spirituality as a worship leader were shaped (e.g. confidence to bring their authentic selves to their worship leadership, entrusting the service to God).

6) The mentoring, mutual support, and the sharing of feedback of student colleagues had the greatest impact on participants’ learning. The guidance, affirmation and
mentorship of faculty and staff were cited as well. The Formation environment’s balance of the theoretical and the practical, its encouragement of creativity and growth, and its accepting atmosphere were also named as conducive to learning. Finally, prayer and relationship with God were acknowledged as the source of development for some students.

7) Study participants’ expectations of the theological school chapel varied. Some expected it to be like a learning lab, some expected it to be primarily a group spiritual practice, and one student expected a model church service. Some chose a combination of these three models. Regardless of the model chosen, formal evaluation was welcomed by all the study participants except one. As Nora pointed out, whether or not formal evaluation is required, informal evaluation is always happening. This was not considered an obstacle to the ‘worshipfulness’ of the experience.

8) Most study participants employ a balance of original material, UCC resources, and non-UCC resources in their worship planning, indicating at least some commitment to the concept of ordered liberty.

Many of these insights will be explored more fully in the next chapter’s reporting of the interviews, and in Chapters 8 and 9.
Chapter 6

Interviews

6.1 Introduction

Five of the fourteen volunteers for this research project were chosen for one-on-one interviews of about an hour in length, either in person or on Skype. Interviewees were selected based on the depth of articulation in their questionnaire responses. Care was also taken to balance factors such as age, gender, amount of congregational experience before beginning their theological studies, geographic location, year of graduation, and diversity of opinion expressed in the questionnaire. The focal point of the one-on-one interview was the sharing of one or two stories. Stories articulate where we have been and where we are going. They also shape our understanding of who we are.\(^{317}\) Interviewees were asked to give an account of a chapel experience that was particularly memorable or developmental for them. Summaries of these stories are presented below. The interviewees were then asked to consider possible factors of influence on their learning from these experiences. Summaries of the influences identified are presented separately in section 6.3. To close out this chapter, interviewees’ metaphors for presiding are shared.

6.2 Significant Stories of Chapel Worship

6.2.1 Amy

Amy shared two stories, the first of which concerned an experience of informal, unsolicited feedback. After leading a service incorporating Godly Play, a fellow student pointed

out that he couldn’t hear Amy because she was looking down at the Godly Play materials as she told the scripture story. Her initial reaction was defensiveness but quickly came to accept and embrace the feedback. She learned from this experience the importance of “speaking clearly, articulating carefully” so that even when congregants can’t see her face, they can hear her. 318

In Amy’s second story, she planned a worship service that included an unusual Biblical interpretation. When she saw a certain guest in the pews that day, Amy’s immediate reaction on seeing the guest was concern, then guilt, then fear. She worried that the guest might be offended by her interpretation, and then tried to adapt her text on the fly so that she wouldn’t offend. Amy did not check if the guest was offended after the service ended. From this experience Amy learned that she needs to be careful with her words and be aware that there will be different viewpoints amongst congregants.

6.2.2 Lee

The first time she led chapel worship, Lee was given a scripture text to read that included a genealogy. Although she didn’t know how to pronounce many of the names, she read the passage with confidence. After the service a professor approached her and said, “Good for you. You didn’t know how to pronounce half of the names but you said them with confidence anyway.” Lee reported that it felt good to receive affirmation after what was a challenge for her. She then asked herself, “How would I do it differently next time?” and decided that she would get the text beforehand and read it over. She was motivated to study the Biblical text so that she would have a deeper understanding.

Lee has taken what she learned from this experience into her current pastoral charge. She recently gave a parishioner the same advice: “It doesn’t have to be perfect – just go for it!”

318 All quotations in the storytelling section refer to the interview transcripts of the respective interviewees.
also sends the scripture texts by email (including phonetic spellings for names) to help lay readers prepare for Sunday worship.

In Lee’s second story, she was in attendance at a service led by classmates. Their assignment, for their Worship Foundations course, was to conduct an ecumenical chapel worship service. At this service, the story of Jesus turning the tables was acted out by two students. “Jesus” spoke in a very loud and angry voice and when the table was flipped it sounded “like a gun shot.” Lee was shocked, confused, and unsettled by the service. “This shouldn’t be happening!” she thought during the service. In the interview, she reported, “Nothing about it felt like worship that I knew.” It was a new, different, unknown, and tense experience. She felt spiritually unsettled rather than spiritually fed. She noticed that the person next to her seemed to feel the same way, which both distracted her and comforted her, knowing that she wasn’t alone. After the service, feedback was shared with the worship leaders both in written form and in conversation in her Worship Foundations class. It was widely discussed informally on campus in the following weeks. Lee also prayed about it. After a while she became “okay” with it.

Lee is still unpacking this experience, especially when that scripture passage comes up in the lectionary. She learned from this worship experience that it is good to check with the congregation to see if it stills feels like worship to them when she does something unique, and that it is okay to have things be unsettling and uncomfortable in worship from time to time. “Worship [should be] engaging,” she reported, “but also make people leave thinking. You don’t want to just give people like, ‘Yeah, you’re awesome. You’re great. Everything you do is perfect.’ You want people to go home and think. How did it challenge them in their coming week to do things differently, to live even better, to treat God’s creation even better?”
6.2.3 Bea

Bea shared her experience of writing a communion liturgy, preparing for and co-presiding at it, and carefully thinking through each element from beginning to end. The communion was served in the pews that day, which is unusual for United Church of Canada Formation worship. It went “really well” and people told her that afterwards. Bea didn’t know how to create a communion liturgy so she looked it up. Her research built up her confidence and familiarized her with UCC worship resources. She liked having the opportunity to tell the whole story of faith in the communion prayer. Following the service she received this feedback from another student: “That was the best communion that I’ve experienced at AST.” Her immediate response was to credit her thorough preparation. She later used that communion liturgy for her first communion service as an ordained minister. Through this experience Bea learned that “worship is about preparation, a lot of it is,” while still allowing for spontaneity.

6.2.4 Meg

Meg recalled a Transfiguration service she attended that was led by two younger students. She found it to be theologically sound, very personal, contextual, and spiritual. She was impressed by how natural the leaders were and that the service didn’t have the traditional format. It really touched her. She could recall it now because she didn’t feel that she was touched by much else (including her own services). She regrets not demonstrating her best work at AST. She cited several reasons for not being able to deliver what she felt to be “a message that was reflective of her spirituality.” She felt anxious about her academic work, so that took priority when she allocated her time. She faced significant personal problems in that period which demanded her time and attention. In Wednesday worship, she didn’t feel the same kind of pressure to perform well as she felt in her Field Education site.
While experiencing the Transfiguration service, Meg felt hopeful for the church. She was responsible for filling out a feedback form that week. She usually thought that evaluating worship took away from the experience of worship, but it didn’t that time. Her first reflection was into the Word itself. She processed that piece of scripture more deeply than she ever had. She reflected on the spiritual maturity of the worship leaders. She felt different; she realized that Wednesday worship could really be meaningful for her. The service felt like devotion rather than a set formula. It felt original rather than “someone saying someone else’s words.” Through this experience Meg learned a certain comfort in being vulnerable in worship and relating personal experiences to the scripture. She admits that she already held that belief, but this service acted as a confirmation of it and a good example of how to do it well.

6.2.5 Hal

The worship experience that Hal shared was the same worship service that Lee reflected on earlier. As a requirement for a Worship Foundations course, Hal planned and led an experiential telling of the Biblical story of Jesus and the moneychangers with two other students. With this service he wanted to deliver something “way outside the box” to change things up, because he had found the established rhythm of ecumenical worship in his first term at AST to be “formulaic.”

Acting the role of Jesus, he said that feeling Jesus’ anger was a “really powerful experience.” The worship service was “such a great experience” for him. It had so much possibility, so much excitement. Embodying this confusing and powerful text felt “refreshing” to Hal. After the service, he felt very vulnerable, like he had broken his relationship with the community and there was no place to repair it. (The violence enacted in the drama was, he believed, counter to his personality.) He reflected with his co-planner after the service. This
debrief was “exhilarating.” He heard feedback from other students next. “It takes me a long time to reflect and synthesize,” Hal admits. Reflection on this event continued well after it was over.

Through this experience Hal learned that worship should be disorienting sometimes. It is a way to “get us out of our heads.” There is much in the world that God is angry about. However, worship can’t always be “shock value.” The turning of the tables couldn’t be performed every week. He learned to balance. It’s like a “change-up in baseball.” In his current pastoral charge, Hal plans a change-up (e.g. a sermon consisting of painting for 16 minutes) somewhere in each church season.

Now that we have heard the interviewees’ stories of significant chapel experiences and what they have carried with them from those experiences into their current worship leadership, we turn our attention to the specific factors that contributed to their learning through those experiences.

### 6.3 Factors of Influence

Through sustained reflection, the five interviewees were encouraged to name factors that influenced the chapel worship experiences they recalled in their stories. After a general question about their reflection process on the event and their learning, they were asked specifically what they brought personally to the situation that influenced their experience. This could be personality traits, attitudes, expectations, prior experiences, or hopes, for example. They were asked about the spiritual or theological factors that influenced their experience and learning. Next, they shared how the learning environment contributed. The learning environment could include the physical space, program structure, or ethos of worship in the AST chapel. Did they encounter any spoken or unspoken values about United Church worship, Wednesday afternoon worship, or AST chapel worship? They were also asked, “How did your classmates, faculty, or
others influence your learning experience?” and “Where was God in the story you shared?” All of the factors that the interviewees named have been collated into two categories: internal and external factors.

6.3.1 Internal Factors

Personality traits such as perfectionism,\textsuperscript{319} nervousness/anxiousness,\textsuperscript{320} and a tendency to “start at the extreme and then moderate over time”\textsuperscript{321} contributed to the interviewees’ experiences. Prior experiences and training such as Godly Play training\textsuperscript{322} and vocal training\textsuperscript{323} were also significant factors. Interviewees referred to their previous depth of congregational experience and worship leadership experience, or lack thereof, as influential. Interviewees also brought to the worship experience their personal goals or hopes for the service they were leading or attending. For example, Bea hoped to create a communion experience that was “reverent, spiritual, dignified, uplifting;” Hal hoped to “make an impression, take a stand” with his service; and Meg wished to “see something done well.”

Personal theologies also impacted the interviewees’ approaches to chapel worship and their responses to their experiences. They cited beliefs about the Bible, communion, the church, God, and the Holy Spirit as foundations on which they built their worship services and frameworks within which they comprehended their experiences. Amy planned her service on the foundational understanding of God as “having created and \textit{is} creating,” and the Holy Spirit as “being in constant motion.” Hal’s understanding of church as a “not always comfortable place,”

\textsuperscript{319} Amy I4b.  
\textsuperscript{320} Bea I4d.  
\textsuperscript{321} Hal I5a.  
\textsuperscript{322} Amy I4b.  
\textsuperscript{323} Lee I4b.
and his conviction about Jesus inviting the recognition of the disjointedness between God’s vision for us and humanity’s current reality, together framed his feeling of satisfaction with his “turning of the tables” experiential service.

Interviewees’ personal spiritualities also shaped their experiences of learning. Amy felt God’s presence in her worship planning and heard the Holy Spirit speaking to her through her classmate. Hal understood God to be working through him or “in spite of” him when he led worship. Lee credited her time in personal prayer with bringing her to new learning after she experienced a service that challenged her understanding of worship.

A key factor in the learning experiences shared by the interviewees was their expectation of chapel worship as a place for learning. Interviewees brought a variety of expectations with them to chapel worship. Amy and Hal firmly held the belief that chapel worship is a learning lab and sought to push the boundaries. Lee expected that she would be spiritually fed in worship, that it would be challenging, and that she would learn something. Bea thought of chapel worship more as a technical task or assignment, a position also held by Meg. “I should have thought of God more,” Bea said. Bea also thought worship at AST would be more formal. She was surprised at how informal and free it was. Meg thought the opposite. She expected worship to be more contemporary at AST, and because it was a university, she expected it to be more “cutting edge.” Meg would have liked more “liberty” in the “ordered liberty” that is UCC worship. Meg didn’t expect the range of student skills and theologies she encountered at AST. She was also clear in her preference for no formal evaluation of chapel worship services, even after she learned that she could both worship and evaluate in the same service. She saw chapel worship as solely a worship service rather than a training ground.
All of these personal factors could either challenge or facilitate learning. The biggest challenge to learning seemed to be Meg’s rejection of the understanding of chapel worship as learning opportunity. When asked what she learned in her chapel worship experiences, she was the only person to answer, “Nothing.” However, careful examination of her statements reveals a few activities that Meg found helpful during her time in Formation, such as the handling of the communion elements, whether or not she was conscious of this learning at the time.

Those factors that posed obstacles to learning were overcome in many of these stories by the employment of either internal or external interventions. For example, Bea addressed her nervousness or anxiety about leading worship by doing thorough research and careful preparation. Lee’s personal prayer helped her to come to accept a broader understanding of worship. She also shared that over time she “grew a thicker skin” which helped her to hear and learn from the feedback she received at school and on her internship site.

6.3.2 External Factors

The physical space of the AST chapel was considered a factor in learning because it is a flexible space that allows for the rearrangement of items such as pews and pulpit, and yet it remains a “stereotypical chapel” to work within or react against. The most commonly mentioned attribute of the chapel was the acoustics. Some consider them to be difficult and others think they are good. The acoustics in the AST chapel demand that students learn to speak clearly and distinctly without amplification.

The ecumenical nature of chapel worship on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays was a significant factor, as was the expectation that collegial worship planning and leadership take place within teams of students and faculty. Some study participants thrived on working in teams, while others struggled with clashing personalities, theologies, expectations,
and worship traditions. Bea noted that one needs confidence to share one’s thoughts while collaborating on liturgy planning.

The fact that AST worship takes place within an academic setting is also a key factor in students’ worship experiences and reflection on those experiences. Study participants felt that the learning environment in and of itself gave them permission to experiment, “to go big and fail big” and to learn from it with professors and student peers. The tension between chapel as worship and chapel as learning opportunity was acknowledged. Four interviewees felt that it could be both. Bea said that chapel worship was also an opportunity for her to “set aside worries and experience God and connection to others.”

Next, interviewees named two further factors in their worship experiences and learning: the ethos of UCC worship as offering the freedom to be creative; and the ethos of AST ecumenical worship as an “almost monastic” practice of reflective, meditative daily prayer.

The spoken and unspoken values that the interviewees encountered in their experiences of worship at AST worship also influenced their learning. Values reported by the interviewees were collegiality in planning and leading worship; experimentation in worship; UCC theology; music that reflects UCC ethos; and inclusive language. They spoke of encountering the value placed on authenticity and humility in leading worship, and the conviction that the Bible and the congregation should be treated with respect. Hal also named the unspoken, clashing traditions of ecumenical worship planning as influential in his story.

Four of the interviewees found the AST chapel to be a safe place to explore because of the support of faculty and fellow students.\textsuperscript{324} This safe place was “created by the development

\textsuperscript{324} When asked, Meg responded that people didn't influence her learning. Meg I4e.
of positive relationships, trust in the integrity of faculty wanting to help students develop as worship leaders, and trust in fellow students to want the best for one another.”

Interviewees experienced the influence of faculty in a variety of ways. Bea knew that faculty help was always available. Hal understood the Worship Foundations professor to be “in his corner” as a “built-in support,” because his worship service was a course requirement. The interviewees expressed appreciation for the informal verbal and solicited written feedback they received from faculty members. Lee said, “Faculty members were really good at giving the worship team feedback for the day, even when no evaluation forms were handed out.” Amy appreciated the encouragement of faculty who never said, “You went too far.” She understood that to mean that she had permission to continue to “push the boundaries” at school and in the worship life of her current pastoral charge. Lee spoke about her experiences with faculty during the worship planning process. She said:

Faculty challenged us – asked us why we wanted to do things, encouraged us to do something off-the-wall and see what happens. “Maybe it will fall flat. That’s going to be your learning experience because you’re not going to hit it out of the park every Sunday and you need to know that now . . . .” Faculty aren’t criticizing you, they’re saying, “In my 20, 30 years of experience, here’s what I’ve seen, here’s what could be helpful for you.”

Two groups of student peers influenced the interviewees’ worship experiences and learning when they led worship: their worship planning teams, and the worshippers who attended their chapel services. Interviewees also reported that they learned simply through observation of other students’ worship services and what worked and didn’t work for them. They gained a wide range of ideas in this way. According to Hal, “When somebody like X [an experienced and gifted classmate] runs worship, I learn a lot from her. I pick up a mannerism or

325 Amy TR4e.

326 Lee I4e and 5a.
a sense of humility and think, ‘Wow, that’s really powerful.’ So, you almost play with that idea or mannerism. You play with that identity.” Interviewees appreciated the receipt of feedback from their peers, especially in the form of conversation. Hal said that it was through discussions with others that he learned whether he was “the rule or the exception to the rule,” and learned new ways of being. Interviewees found concrete feedback to be the most helpful.

In addition to the informal, unsolicited sharing of feedback and lunch table conversations, activities built into the UCC Formation and AST academic programming to debrief worship experiences (such as written feedback forms, self-reflections, and classroom conversations) were significant factors in the interviewees’ learning. Bea reported that she liked the process of reflection after the worship service, “the thinking part more than the writing part.” For her, the writing reflection assignment ensured that reflection happened during the busyness of the term and helped her to answer the question she often asked herself as she approached graduation: “What kind of worship services do I want to lead?”

The interviewees reported that there were times when it was difficult to receive feedback. As Meg put it, the initial defensiveness that is part of our protection for our survival as human beings must be overcome. Sometimes people would give Lee “something to work on” that she thought she had done well and that was “deflating” for her. However, she found it helpful to learn if others experienced what she had planned in the way that she had intended it. Interviewees also felt that their peers didn’t always take the time to give detailed feedback. If they just “checked the boxes” on the evaluation form and the feedback “wasn’t very deep,” it also wasn’t very helpful. Meg posited an explanation for this:

I think that part of the problem was that the [written] feedback, and I found myself doing this too as time went by, is really tempered, because we all have to be together. And even though constructive criticism is a helpful thing, it’s also a divisive thing. It can be. And in a tight-knit community, I think that the evaluations of me were kinder and gentler
than they should have been. And so there’s a little bit of loss of value in that because everybody’s not being quite as open as they might want to be - because they like you! Or they care about you and they know you’re going through this or that or the other and they don’t want to dump more stuff on you. So I’m not sure that method brings out true evaluation.  

Bea spoke of the difficulty of receiving feedback in these terms: “Sometimes I felt like [my worship service] went more or less fine. Does it always have to be better next time? Like things should be perfect or they’re not worth doing or something. But that’s not a good attitude. Sometimes the feedback sort of feels like that to me.”

All of the interviewees could recall something that they had learned from feedback they had received from peers after they led worship. Often they were fairly small things, like the pacing of a prayer, but they remember them in part because they understand them to be important things for their effectiveness as worship leaders. Hal told this story about what he learned from a feedback form he had received: “The example that comes to mind is one Formation worship when [my worship team] wanted everyone to sit on the floor, but there was [a worship attendee] in a wheelchair and what does that mean for our worshipping? . . . Remembering how to be inclusive, that’s an important part.”

Interviewees found the giving of feedback equally challenging. They didn’t want to be overly critical. As Lee said, “I like to be nice!”

But I also took [feedback forms] seriously as a place for people to learn. And sometimes it was challenging to me if I felt like a worship service really wasn’t engaging enough for anybody or if the worship leader seemed completely disorganized. It’s hard to give somebody that feedback and not have them feel crappy about it later. So just getting okay with that and also learning language that’s helpful and not critical in those times.  

Amy made a strong case for sharing honest feedback with peers.

327 Meg I7.

328 Lee I7.
I’ve always appreciated feedback that is honest, and so that’s what I’ve tried to offer other students, always with the intention that it would be an honest critique and not a criticism, because there is a difference between the two. So to say honestly, “This is what I saw. This is how I felt. Maybe you could do this instead?” And at first I felt uncomfortable doing that because it’s kind of hard to offer that sort of thing. But then I thought, I wouldn’t be asked to give feedback if I was just going to say, “Yes, it was all lovely.” There’s got to be a reason why I’ve been asked to do this. And so I took that seriously and said what I needed to say, couched, I hope, in helpful language that did not hurt.\(^\text{329}\)

Bea welcomed completing the feedback forms because they gave her another opportunity to think about the service she had just attended. Just one interviewee mentioned the challenge of worshipping while evaluating. Meg said that filling in feedback forms was a “teeny bit of an interruption” to her worship. “I became an evaluator instead of a worshipper,” she said.

The interviewees generated a fulsome list of internal and external factors that influenced their learning from their chapel experiences. Internal factors included personality traits such as perfectionism; prior experiences and training (or lack thereof); personal hopes for the service; personal theologies; personal spiritualities; and the rejection of or embracing of the expectation of worship as learning lab.

External factors included the physical space; the ecumenical nature of daily chapel and the accompanying clashing theologies and worship traditions; the freedom the academic setting and the UCC ethos provides to experiment and innovate; and spoken and unspoken worship values such as the use of inclusive language. Other external factors were Faculty assistance, encouragement and challenge, including informal unsolicited verbal feedback as well as solicited formal written feedback; and observing and imitating other students, offering them feedback, as well as receiving informal or formal feedback from their student colleagues.

These internal and external factors can facilitate or block learning. Any obstacle can be overcome by an internal intervention (such as self-talk or research or personal prayer), or an

\(^{329}\) Amy I7.
external intervention (such as concrete, detailed written feedback). In Chapter 8 a map of the learning process, drawn from the experiences of the interviewees, will be presented.

6.4 Metaphors for Presiding

During the interview, each participant was asked if they have any images or metaphors to describe their role as presider. Two offered the term facilitator. They see the role of presider as connecting with the congregation and the Holy Spirit; and as connecting the congregation with God, with the story of faith, with each other, and with God’s mission for the world. Feeling those connections is a source of joy for Lee. Bea, although she didn’t use the word facilitator to describe her understanding, also spoke passionately of the connectional aspect of presiding. Members of the focus group offered conduit as an image of presider as connector.

Amy described the facilitator as one who offers opportunities for congregants to “open wider doors, open bigger eyes,” and “expand their thinking.” Hal also used the image of “opening people’s eyes.” For him, the presider helps people to experience, acknowledge, and worship the Divine by “trying to open people’s eyes to the working of God in the world and how God is already working in their lives.” Hal jokingly called himself a “circus master.”

Joking aside, I think that this image is apropos, in that the circus master’s job is to draw the audience’s attention to the ring in which amazing events are taking place. The “ring” suggests the places in which God is already working in worshippers’ lives. Hal also sees the presider as a director, as in the director of a play. “The tricky part,” he said, “is not stealing the show.”

Other interviewees and the focus group suggested further images for the presider’s work. The focus group favoured the metaphors of prism and vessel. Amy offered the image of

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330 Chloe FG.

331 Otis FG.
host, a symbol of sustenance. Her congregants are “valued guests attending her party and they deserve the best I’ve got.” Interviewees lifted up the teaching role, the pastoral care role, and the prophetic role of the presider. Meg stated that it is the presider’s responsibility to “allow the entire worship service to deliver the good news of God’s human and divine revelation in Christ, while also challenging our natural inclination toward complacency in our faith.”

While the interviewees were invited to share metaphors for their worship leadership in an attempt to simplify, clarify, and summarize self-understanding, the metaphors also revealed participants’ spirituality of presiding. It is significant that all of the metaphors offered connect somehow to the four actions of the Holy Spirit described by Rogers and presented in Chapter 3. The metaphor of host elevates the Holy Spirit’s action of befriending matter and working through the physical such as bread, wine, and people to accomplish her work. The images of facilitator/conduit/connector relate directly to the Holy Spirit’s action of bridging the distance between the human and the divine, and collapsing the distance by absorbing creation into the Trinitarian embrace. Like the interviewees who spoke of opening eyes and doors, Rogers asserts that this bridging action of the Spirit also begins with the action of opening. The image of the vessel recalls that it is through the indwelling and outpouring of the Spirit that presiders are empowered to serve. Empowerment is the third action of the Holy Spirit. The fourth action, transfiguration, isn’t as clearly articulated in the metaphors shared by the interviewees. The prism could act as a visual representation of the transformation of the people, places, and things the Spirit infuses. Hal certainly named one of his responsibilities as presider to be opening people’s eyes to how God is already at work in their lives, which would include befriending, opening, empowering, and transforming, for their sake, the church’s sake, and the sake of the world.

332 Sensing, 167.
6.5 Summary

In this chapter, we have explored more fully how study participants are formed as worship leaders in the AST chapel through stories of significant chapel experiences and what they learned from them. Internal and external factors that influenced their learning were reported next. Internal factors included personality traits, prior experiences and training, personal hopes for the service, personal theologies and spiritualities, and the rejection or embracing of the expectation of worship as learning lab.

External factors included the physical space; the ecumenical nature of daily chapel; the freedom that the academic setting and the UCC ethos provide to experiment and innovate; spoken and unspoken worship values. Assistance, encouragement, challenge, and feedback from Faculty; observing and imitating other students; and giving feedback to and receiving feedback from student colleagues were further external factors. These internal and external factors either presented challenges to learning, or they facilitated learning. Interviewees reported overcoming challenges through the employment of either internal or external interventions. For example, Lee employed personal prayer and informal conversation with student colleagues when presented with a worship service that challenged the core of her understanding of what worship is.

The chapter concluded with a reflection on metaphors for presiding favoured by study participants – conduit, vessel, circus master, host, prism – and how they relate to Rogers’ account of the four actions of the Holy Spirit. These images give us a more complete picture of study participants’ understandings of their spirituality as presiders. In the next chapter, by reviewing the work of the Focus Group (the third and final data gathering stage of the research
project), we will seek to gain a more complete picture of how the gap between experience and learning is spanned.
Chapter 7

The Focus Group

7.1 Introduction

Once the interviews and the initial data analysis was complete, three other study participants, an outside expert/note-taker (OE), and I (as facilitator) met as a focus group. Care was taken to balance age, gender, graduating year, length of experience in The United Church of Canada and diversity of opinion on the questionnaire. The OE was an experienced Atlantic School of Theology Formation Director from a different denomination, who took handwritten notes during the meeting and presented her observations to the group. The purpose of this group was to review the data to date and to continue the process of analysis and interpretation. The Focus Group completed the triangulation of data that is crucial to increasing the credibility of the study results.

7.2 Two or Three Words

The daylong focus group began the same way each interview began, with the sharing of two or three words that described the participants’ experiences at AST. “Relationships,” “expansive,” “dislocating,” “learning,” “experiential,” “challenging,” and “nerve-wracking at times” were added to the list generated earlier by the interviewees. The interviewees offered the terms “life-giving,” “challenging,” “affirming,” “engaging,” “spirit-led,” “stretching,” “positive,” “intense,” “variety,” “academic,” “educational,” and “formative.”

When asked to narrow their focus to chapel worship, focus group members used the following words to describe their experiences at AST: “creative,” “refreshing,” “frightening,”

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333 Her affiliation with a non-UCC denomination and lack of participation in the UCC Formation program gave her ample distance to connect key comments, identify assumptions, and raise questions.

334 See Appendix I for the focus group questions.
“variety,” “devotional,” and “boundaries but not.” These terms are consistent with the range of words offered by the interviewees, which were “uncomfortable,” “frustrating,” “opportunity to experiment,” “unique every week,” “pushing myself a bit,” “anxious,” “positive (collaborative, confidence-building),” “fellowship,” “routine,” “sanctuary,” “an extra responsibility,” “eye-opening,” “disheartening,” and “very mixed.” Three interviewees chose the word “challenging” to describe their experience in chapel worship.

These words reveal the range of experiences study participants have had at AST in general and in chapel worship specifically. They also reveal the degree to which participants felt challenged in their worship experiences. The conversation turned next to the causes of the challenges that the focus group members experienced when they were students.

### 7.3 Spanning the Gap Between Worship Experience and Learning

After reviewing a summary of the questionnaire and interview data, the focus group was invited to direct their attention to the process that students must move through to span the distance between a worship experience and new learning. The focus group members’ contributions are presented in the categories used earlier in this thesis, when I reported on the interview results. Chloe, Kay, and Otis identified internal and external challenges they faced in chapel worship, and some of the ways these challenges were met in order to facilitate learning.

The first challenge discussed was the expectation that chapel worship is a learning lab. For Kay, this expectation caused her to feel like she was being scrutinized “under a microscope.” She was very aware that she was being evaluated when she led Wednesday worship. This awareness was accompanied by feelings of discomfort and fear that she would make mistakes and not “measure up.” As a result she couldn’t be her authentic self. Kay
acknowledged that some stress is needed in order to stretch and grow, and that feedback she received at the time did help her learn.

Chloe had a different reaction to the perceived expectation of experimentation in Wednesday worship. She felt *self-imposed* pressure to always be innovating, even when what she occasionally needed was structure and quiet. She said, “Sometimes it’s good to experience something familiar.” Otis also acknowledged that he felt competition to be “the most innovative” and that it was “exhausting” to be creative all the time. Even so, he appreciated the opportunity to be innovative in worship. The participants thought that this competition was in part inherent to the academic setting, connected to our denominational ethos which values originality in worship, and embedded in our North American culture. Otis noted that chapel worship is actually a lab within a lab, because the students are “both the experimenters and the mice.”

The focus group members’ criticism of the learning lab model provided perspectives that are dissimilar from the majority of the interviewees who, at least in part, embraced the concept of learning lab. Two of the five interviewees were in fact staunch supporters of it. In her questionnaire, Chloe described chapel worship as first and foremost a habit of daily devotion, then a space for experimentation and honing of best practices. Kay described it as a team exercise not relevant to congregational ministry. Otis thought that while it can be a place for both experimentation and living into best practices, he preferred to think of chapel worship as an experience in “widening our worship vision.”

The group identified some discoveries that, over time, helped them to address the stress and pressure that students sometimes feel in planning and leading Wednesday worship. Through attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship experiences, they learned that
differences in opinion do not devalue them as persons. They came to realize that others experience worship differently than they do (e.g., communion words that deeply moved one person didn’t bring any sense of the sacred or holy to another person), and that there is great diversity in every congregation. Finally, they discovered that the students and faculty in the AST chapel are there first and foremost to worship.

In regards to the denominational Formation program, concerns were raised about the challenges of planning and leading worship in teams. The team model did not translate well into the current ministry situation of two of the participants. It was sometimes difficult to work with such a variety of people at theological school. Tensions between personalities, theologies, and traditions were not uncommon. It was also a challenge to create a new planning team every week. With the time pressures of the academic term, it was difficult for team members to find opportunities to meet in person to plan. My observations during several years as Formation Director lead me to conclude that time pressures are a significant factor when teams plan worship by “filling in the blanks.”

Benefits of working in teams were also named. It taught students to collaborate effectively with others. They came to recognize that it isn’t about one person’s vision, but about the team coming together and collectively shaping the vision for the service and collaboratively accomplishing the task of leading worship. These are skills that are helpful in ministry. Some study participants seek out worship planning partners in their current ministry contexts because of their positive worship team experiences in the AST chapel.

In terms of physical space, difficult acoustics and space configurations are ministry problems in many churches. The focus group thought it helped to have experiences at AST of rearranging the chapel furniture and speaking without a sound system. They learned to adapt to
different spaces and effectively utilize the sanctuary space, as well as develop vocal skills of projection and enunciation.

When considering the ethos of worship, the group confirmed that they felt more freedom in Wednesday Formation than in the context of ecumenical chapel services. Participants would have preferred to have the opportunity for increased “liberty” in AST ecumenical daily worship (on non-Formation Program days). They felt pressured to plan services for those days that wouldn’t be too extreme or intense for students of other denominations. In this instance, the focus group members seemed to be imposing the UCC bias toward creativity in worship on the prayer book traditions of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and contradicting their earlier comments about unwelcome pressure to innovate.

The variety of worship experienced in Wednesday UCC Formation had a positive impact on students. It helped them to realize that “it isn’t about them.” Worship is more than what they personally think is meaningful in worship. Witnessing the diversity of students’ backgrounds, theologies, and gifts for worship broadened their own ministry leadership. It situated them in the UCC, which is especially important for UCC persons who were raised in other denominations. They found the experience of Wednesday worship rich in its variety. They also appreciated learning practicalities like preparing and serving communion in chapel worship, and would have liked more opportunities to learn things like how to prepare ashes for Ash Wednesday.

The focus group members also commented on experiencing the presence of faculty in worship as meaningful to the students. However, they wanted the faculty to worship with them, “not carrying a clipboard.” One participant wished that more faculty would attend worship, especially on Wednesday afternoons.
Receiving feedback from peers and faculty was sometimes “hard to take, and hard to get over,” although it is essential to learn how to receive feedback with grace for the work of ministry. For Otis, it got better after the first year. (Lee said the same thing in her interview.) Otis’ first response to someone giving feedback might have been, “Who do you think you are?!” But in time he usually ended up thinking, “You’re right.” Kay reported that part of the learning was discerning whether she needed to change something she did or whether that was just one person’s opinion or preference. Receiving feedback gave her opportunities to learn to manage her feelings, and to receive criticism without getting defensive. She learned to say nothing at the time but take away the information and consider what should or could be changed. Otis underlined the importance of gaining “the ability to fail and not be destroyed,” to receive feedback in the spirit it was given, and to encourage the sharing of feedback in future congregations.

In summary, the focus group members identified five challenges of chapel worship that they needed to address in order to span the gap between experience and learning: the competitive pressure to innovate within and amongst students; tensions between personalities, theologies, and traditions when working collaboratively to plan and lead worship; coordinating schedules and the time it takes to work in teams; the layout and acoustics of the physical chapel space; and receiving feedback without getting defensive and giving helpful feedback. Like the interviewees, the focus group members named a series of internal and external strategies to be helpful in their learning, such as receiving feedback from others and observing other students.

7.4 Wisdom Gleaned

After their conversation on the stress and pressure of chapel worship as learning lab, I was surprised by the focus group members’ summary of the wisdom they gleaned from their
review of the data: “risk-taking is good.” In Otis’ words, “You might soar. You might fall. Your peers are there to catch you with honest and helpful feedback.” Acquiring both the ability to give and receive feedback and the courage to risk in chapel worship proved to strengthen future ministry leadership. The wisdom that Kay gleaned from the formation conversation was a more nuanced understanding of liberty. She suggested that it could be understood as freedom to range, to be diverse, even to try something new if you like, and see how it lands. This understanding of liberty to range felt more freeing to her than the association with the experimental lab model and its accompanying expectation to innovate. Kay’s understanding of liberty, the freedom to range, sounds more like the metaphor of playground than laboratory.

7.5 Recommendations

To round out the morning schedule, the alumni/ae in the focus group were invited to share up to three wishes for current UCC Formation students. They also reviewed every recommendation that study participants made in their questionnaires and the interviews. All these recommendations – for individual students, for the learning community, and for program changes – are reported for the first time in this section of the thesis.

7.5.1 Wishes for Individual Students

Study participants wished for current students to understand the privilege they are being offered and take full advantage of chapel worship. “Sometimes it’s like that other thing that you have to do on top of everything else,” one noted. “However, the ecumenical aspect of it is invaluable.”335 Current students were encouraged to try to appreciate the moments of worship as they occurred, and to bring both their hearts and their heads to worship opportunities.

335 Lee 117.
Hal wished that current students would be “filled with a deep sense of the long, beautiful tradition of the work of the church and the new, unfolding work of God in the world.” He hoped that as they preside in worship, they would “melt into the love of the community and the love of God.”

Bea recommended that current students “put care into what they prepare so they can learn more, to take the time to do that.” Hal and Amy wished students to be filled with creativity and courage and urged them to take risks “all the time.” Focus Group members advised listening for the Holy Spirit to move: “Don’t seek formula so much that there is no room for the Holy Spirit.” They also recommended letting go of what worship elements must “look” like.

Current students were encouraged to loosen up, to speak with their own voices, and to practice speaking off-the-cuff. For example, they might tell a Bible story or pray without notes, since “You aren’t compelled to have everything scripted.” And finally Bea wished that first and last, current students will experience God in their worship.

7.5.2 Wishes for the Formation Community

Bea hopes current UCC Formation students will create a good learning environment for each other. She wrote, “I think the students create that a lot by supporting each other.” Amy added that students can be supportive of one another by “taking seriously the ‘team’ aspect of worship preparation and leadership by being thoroughly prepared and practiced so as not to let down the other members of the team; being engaged during worship (no bored looks or yawning!); and sharing honest and constructive feedback.” She hopes that UCC Formation

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336 Hal I17.
337 FG.
338 Bea TR17.
339 Amy TR17.
worship will be “a safe and supportive place in which to practice the art of worship design and leadership, experimenting with creative and innovative elements.” The Focus Group encouraged open-mindedness in both giving and receiving feedback.

Current students were encouraged to take up every opportunity to work in team as it builds essential skills for ministry. Meg suggested that a mentor-type relationship between a new and returning student might be fostered through UCC Formation. Joy recommended that professors meet with students on an individual basis twice yearly, “for the sole purpose of getting to know the student, and understanding their philosophy and theology as it pertains to ministry.”

7.5.3 Wishes for Program Changes

A large number of recommendations were made that pertain to potential program changes. Emma advocated for making attendance at ecumenical daily prayer services mandatory. Hal proposed that rather than working with a different worship team every week, chapel teams lead worship for a whole term together. That would give them a chance to learn what it means to plan and work together and might help replicate the real-life scenarios of accountable ministry. As an alternative to reconfiguring the worship planning teams, Kay suggested giving students opportunities during their three years at AST to develop and preside alone. She feels that this experience would have allowed her to acquire a “more rounded ability as presider.”

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340 Amy Q9a.
341 Joy Q11.
342 Emma Q9a.
343 Kay Q11.
Other students advocated for more practical teaching in the denominational program. Examples include handling the communion elements more; learning Power Point for worship; learning to write original calls to worship, prayers, and blessings; and practicing spontaneous prayer. Other ways to learn could include conducting mock baptisms, marriages, and funerals; mock special services like decommissioning a church building, welcoming members, and covenanting services for a new minister. Learning how to complete the marriage and funeral paperwork was also named. “Now that I am in the field,” Ivy wrote, “I realize how I am relying on service books for these [special services] and it would have been better to have more mock practice.”

Hal wished that more time were spent at AST thinking about how we might empower our congregants to write prayers and lead services. “I think we learned how to become better pray-ers, better worship leaders, presiders, but the piece that is missing for me now is around empowerment. So once you learn how to write a prayer, how do you empower other people to write a prayer? . . . [Worship] is the work of the people.”

Other helpful suggestions were taking the United Church Worship course in the student’s first year of studies as it positively contributes to both Field Education and Formation worship; conducting a library tour of the worship preparation resources; and having group discussions on worship experiences from students’ Field Education sites.

As expected, study participants had recommendations about the process of sharing feedback. Meg hopes that the current iteration of formal evaluation will get dropped. She’d like to see worship as “purely a worship service, a time of sanctuary and fellowship building.” She said, “You learn just by having the experience. I think that the Spirit would work through us,

\[344\] Ivy Q11.
\[345\] Hal I17.
and inform us more, if there were more of a feeling of safety/sanctuary in that half hour.” She advocates instead for setting aside time for each worship team to reflect together on their service, possibly the following week, so that they can learn from each other, share critiques with each other, if they feel comfortable doing that, and think about what they could have done better as a team. Hal wishes that there could be more feedback peer-to-peer and recommends that the UCC Formation Group spend time every week debriefing worship together. “I’d often wondered what it would be like to take the worship service each week in formation,” he wrote, “and then unpack it as a group so we get really good at hearing feedback, offering feedback, and learning from each other.”

Unsurprisingly, the members of the focus group engaged in an animated and lengthy conversation about the sharing of feedback concerning students’ performances in UCC Formation worship. Surprisingly, given their earlier discussion about the stress they felt around chapel worship, they called for more sharing of feedback, not less. When I asked, “Wouldn’t more sharing of feedback make students feel even more like they are under a microscope?,” they answered “Yes, but they’ll get used to it and it will be worth it.” It was their experience that individual written feedback didn’t yield as much in preaching class as the group discussion debrief did. The group discussion was tense at first but then it became “natural and deeper.” It was “raw and awful” but “great” (“like ripping off a band aid.”) In their opinion, they heard the truth in the preaching class discussion/debrief because the feedback was unrehearsed and unfiltered.

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346 Meg I17.

347 Hal TR17.

348 Chloe FG.

349 Otis FG.
The focus group advocated for the same kind of process after UCC Formation worship: a verbal sharing of what was “touching or transforming” or “what reached me” in worship today, to help students to learn to get beyond the standard response of “that was a nice service.” They felt that talking to people directly would make the information easier to absorb and the conversation deeper than what would be possible with a piece of paper.

In summary, the focus group reviewed all the recommendations made by the study participants as well as adding their own. They endorsed the following wishes for current students: that they appreciate one another and their worship life together; that they bring both their hearts and their heads to worship; that they are filled with creativity and courage; that they listen for the Holy Spirit to move; that they let go of what worship elements must “look” like; and that they loosen up and speak with their own voices. The focus group members also encouraged current students to take up every opportunity to work in teams, and to remain open-minded when giving and receiving feedback. Finally, the focus group members endorsed the following recommendations for program changes: giving students the opportunities at AST to plan and lead worship alone; teaching Power Point for worship; teaching how to write original calls to worship, prayers, and blessings; giving students opportunities to practice praying spontaneously; providing opportunities to conduct mock baptisms, marriages, and funerals; offering the United Church Worship course in the student’s first year of studies; and providing more opportunities to share feedback as a Formation Group with the worship team in order to deepen learning.
7.6 Report from Outside Expert

Our outside expert (OE) then reported to the group. She made the observation that much is held in tension in UCC Formation: worship, sustenance of community and individuals, learning new things, and giving feedback. These tensions aren’t necessarily bad, but are hard.

The OE asked, “What assumptions do we make about the leader’s experience of worship being different or the same as their congregants? Do we talk enough about the experience of leading worship?” She thought that there might be something to consider here as she found the questionnaires quite focused on the mechanics of leading worship. In response to her first question, two of the group indicated that they experience themselves as worshipping when they lead worship.

The OE noted that the focus group did not seem drawn to talk about disturbing worship experiences as freely as the interviewees had. She was surprised that the word “boring” wasn’t used once in the day, as she often hears it in association with worship in the secular world. She also pointed out that preaching and music were not big factors in the day’s conversation yet both greatly influence worshippers. How does preparation for worship leadership within the context of AST’s daily ecumenical services and UCC Formation’s Wednesday services compare with the congregational development research?

The OE was interested in how UCC Formation connected with other activities such as the United Church Worship course and Sunday worship at Field Education sites. She asked the focus group, “To what degree is Wednesday worship trying to prepare you for the daily round of the common task of Sunday morning worship?” This question caught the participants’ interest. The resulting discussion concluded that Wednesday worship is not at all like Sunday morning. UCC Formation worship is a half-hour service with no offering, choir anthem, or children’s
time. Wednesday worship is tailored to the specific context and monoculture of theological school. Some pieces of liturgy and tools for delivery would, however, directly apply to Sunday worship, as would the value of planning worship that carefully attends to context.

The tension generated by the UCC norm and Formation Group expectation for innovation was the OE’s next topic to explore. She asked, “What is a ‘reasonable’ planning time for a service? What is sustainable week after week in a congregation? Are there rhythms in the Christian calendar concerning expectations of innovation in worship?” She noted that innovation brings a certain pressure to bear on a student’s time and effort and learning. Chloe admitted at this point that she found creative “out-of-the-box” worship every week exhausting. Otis expressed appreciation for the opportunities that Wednesday worship provides for students to stretch themselves liturgically and theologically. His memories of UCC Formation worship now drive him to find others with whom to plan worship.

The OE expressed surprise that the group moved so quickly to recommending sharing feedback through a five-minute debrief with the UCC Formation Group every Wednesday afternoon. She suggested that a diversity of forms of feedback is needed as students’ learning styles vary. For example, introverts may find it difficult to share their opinions in a five-minute conversation during the same afternoon as the worship service.

Addressing the issue of “What might turn worship from a ‘playground’ into a ‘minefield’ and vice versa?” she argued that feedback is an important thing but isn’t the only thing. Peers, relationships, and skills are also influential. After such a robust conversation about diversity—singing and praying in many different ways, for example—she was surprised when the feedback-sharing proposal collapsed so quickly into the singular recommendation of a five-minute conversation. If feedback sits between playground and minefield, it needs to be broader.
The OE declared the conversation on the sharing of feedback the most animated conversation of the day. She was also interested in the sequencing of feedback sharing. “How long would a cohort have to be together before sharing good feedback? One term? Should students participate in worship during first term uncritiqued? Should senior students lead the way for others?” Chloe loved the idea that second and third year students lead worship in the Fall term and first year students simply absorb everything. Perhaps by Winter term a foundation of trust will have been established in the community that is strong enough to support the giving and receiving of feedback. Otis, as a congregational minister, talked a lot at first in his new men’s group until trust was established and the men felt safe enough to talk. He hardly has to say anything now. Chloe suggested that senior students could model for others the giving and receiving of feedback in the UCC Formation Group.

The OE then turned her attention to possible assumptions that the group had made. She wondered if people were assuming that what feeds them will feed others when planning UCC worship. “We need to get moved off that position and discern the needs of the congregation,” she cautioned. She wondered if students assume that they will have a blank slate when they arrive in pastoral charge. Does AST’s approach to training ministers create expectations of innovation that can’t be met in a significant number of pastoral charges?

She also noted that, in their discussions about ordered liberty, there seemed to be an assumption that routine is easy and innovation is hard. She wondered if the opposite might be true in congregational life. The OE wondered if the Fall term might be set aside for “ordinary” worship and the Winter term for the “innovative.”

The OE thought that all three focus group members assumed that chapel worship is a learning lab. In her tradition, the approach is different. Priests “pray the liturgy;” the presider is
praying too. Does the metaphor change over time as the student’s needs change? How asymmetric is the experience for those with different expectations?

Finally, the OE challenged the assumption that gaps in our preparedness will be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we don’t prepare we can “crash and burn.” People can tell when the Holy Spirit is not in worship. If presiders aren’t quite present to their people, the gaps are sometimes filled by more darkness than light.

The OE concluded her presentation to the focus group by identifying just one further area for research: “Why do we worship at theological school?” The focus group thought that daily prayer in chapel constantly reminds the community whose they are and why they are there. Physically coming together as a community to acknowledge the Holy makes a difference. It solidifies the AST community’s foundation. It encourages each person to live each day as though it is an act of worship. God is worshipped simply because God is “worthy.”

In summary, the OE presented her observations to the group, which generated further conversation. She began by observing that much is held in tension in chapel worship. This tension is not bad but it is hard. She was surprised by the group’s focus on the mechanics of leading worship in their conversation; that the word “boring” was never employed in referring to chapel worship; and that the group moved so quickly to recommend a weekly five-minute debrief of worship when students have different learning styles. The OE felt that the importance of music and preaching in worship were missing from the conversation. She also wondered if clarification is needed concerning the relationship between chapel worship and congregational worship. To what degree should Wednesday chapel worship prepare students for Sunday congregational worship? The OE challenged four assumptions that she identified in the discussion: that what feeds the student liturgically will feed the people in their future

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350 Otis FG.
congregations; that routine is easy and innovation is hard; that, while critiquing the model, Wednesday worship is understood primarily as a learning lab; and that any gaps in preparedness will be filled by the Holy Spirit. The OE recommended one topic for further research: the reasons to meet for worship at theological school.

7.7 Illustrating the Process of Formation for Worship Leadership

To bring the day to a close, the focus group members were invited to share visual depictions or illustrations of the Formation learning process, the process of moving from the worship experience to new insight or understanding. Otis suggested the image of a rollercoaster with its accompanying ups and downs, climbing the hill, and relishing the ride. Chloe offered the image of an open-ended, constantly moving spiral. Students process their learning by spiralling in to the inner self, touch the Holy in the middle, and spiral out again to the wider group learning. Kay proposed an image of a sun with rays of various lengths spreading out from it in different ways, depicting individual approaches to worship and learning.

The OE offered two images from the natural sciences relating to the formation of rock. The first is the making of sedimentary rock, with the constant motion of the waves causing an unnoticed layering of sand until sandstone is formed. This represents the kind of learning that was described earlier in this thesis as habitus, the almost unconscious learning that nonetheless results, through constant repetition, in new ways of being. The second image is the creation of a volcanic rock like basalt. In this case, a single event disrupts the current landscape, introducing a new entity quite forcefully: columns of basalt that quickly harden and cool. The creation of basalt represents those shocking events that disrupt our lives in ways that cause us to question what we had known before; prompt new ways of looking at worship or ministry, the church or
the world; and shift us into new ways of understanding and being. This image aptly depicts transformative learning.

Otis unintentionally offered another image when we answered the final question of the day: “What did your involvement in this research tell you about yourself and your formation?” Otis said that his participation in the research study allowed him to see “which trees were planted and by whom” – seeds that were planted without him noticing at the time.

7.8 Summary

In this chapter, the work of the Focus Group was summarized according to the agenda for the day. Challenges that the focus group members faced in chapel worship were identified as well as the benefits they received by working through those challenges. Five challenges were identified: the competitive pressure to innovate; working collaboratively with worship teams; time pressures; the physical space; and giving and receiving feedback. The wisdom that the members gleaned from the conversation was two-fold: 1) risk-taking in chapel worship strengthens future ministry leadership; and 2) understanding liberty as freedom to range rather than as conducting laboratory experiments may cause less stress for UCC Formation students. This data will be incorporated into the schemas proposed in Chapter 8.

The focus group reviewed all the recommendations made by the study participants and offered their own. They endorsed wishes for current individual students, including that they appreciate one another and their worship life together; that they are filled with creativity and courage; that they listen for the Holy Spirit to move; and that they loosen up and speak with their own voices. The focus group members also encouraged current students to take up every opportunity to work in team, and to remain open-minded when giving and receiving feedback. Finally, the focus group members endorsed several recommendations for program changes,
including giving students opportunities over the three years at AST to plan and lead worship alone; giving students opportunities to practice praying spontaneously; providing opportunities to conduct mock baptisms, marriages, and funerals; and providing more opportunities to share feedback as a Formation Group with the worship team in order to deepen learning. Several of these recommendations will be revisited in Chapter 9.

Next, the OE presented her observations to the group. She began by asserting that although much is held in tension in chapel worship, and it is hard, it isn’t bad. She was surprised that the group moved so quickly to recommend a weekly five-minute debrief of worship when students have different learning styles. She also wondered to what degree Wednesday chapel worship should prepare students for Sunday congregational worship. The OE challenged assumptions that she identified in the discussion, including that routine is easy and innovation is hard. Finally, the OE recommended one topic for further research: the reasons to gather for worship at theological school. The assumption that routine is easy and innovation is hard will be examined further in the next chapter of the thesis.

Two key images were offered as metaphors for formation. The first comes from the process of forming rock. Two kinds of rock represent two kinds of learning in Formation. Sedimentary rock represents the almost unconscious learning that nonetheless results, through constant repetition, in new ways of being. Volcanic rock like basalt represents the learning that is forged through shocking events that shift us into new ways of understanding. The second image is that of planting seeds that grow into trees. These metaphors provide rich images with which to explore the process of formation more fully in the next chapter. It is to the dynamic of ordered liberty in chapel worship and the formation process that we now turn our attention.
Chapter 8

The Dynamic of Ordered Liberty in Chapel Worship and Formation

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will explore key themes that emerge from the study data to more fully flesh out study participants’ understanding of ordered liberty as an organizing motif for both United Church of Canada worship and the process of formation. First, we consider participants’ understandings of order and liberty and the action of the Holy Spirit in worship. Next, the nature of the relationship between order and liberty is explored and a new expression is introduced for consideration. Then ordered liberty in the process of formation is explored by considering study participants’ experiences of continuity and discontinuity, or habitus and de/re/formation. The Holy Spirit’s participation in the process of formation is presented next. Finally, a visual representation of the learning process, drawing on the study participants’ worship stories, will be offered.

8.2 The Dynamic of Ordered Liberty in Worship

In chapter 5, a chart was presented that depicted the study respondents’ use of original material and liturgical resources in their worship planning. The question was intended to identify sources of authority for participants’ liturgies and to capture a sense of the respondents’ commitment to the UCC concept of ordered liberty. It also raised additional questions. How do the study participants understand the practical application of ordered liberty in the weekly UCC worship life at Atlantic School of Theology? Do they understand it to be choosing one or the other (order or liberty); a pendulum swing between the two; nestling one within the other (the ordering of liberty or the liberating of order); a graduated scale between the two end points of
order and liberty; or the dialectic that Kervin describes as the dynamic interplay of tradition and context that “thrills our UCC blood.”

Certainly, study participants referred to ordered liberty in their responses and understood it as an organizing principle for UCC worship. In her transcript review, Meg wrote, “[United Church worship] delivered the ordered part of ordered liberty but I would have liked it to lean into the liberty part a little more.” A careful re-examination of the data revealed the following understandings of order, liberty, and the relationship between the two.

8.2.1 Order in Worship

How do the research participants understand order? Words like “safe,” “comfortable,” “familiar,” “sense of sanctuary in God’s love and acceptance,” “restful,” “structure,” and “quiet” were used when referring to this aspect of worship. Most common was the equation of order with tradition. More specifically, “rooted in tradition,” “honouring the traditions of the ages,” “respect for traditions,” and “appreciation for traditions,” were all offered as positive perspectives on order in worship. Most participants did not specify what they meant by tradition. Referring to the 1932 definition of ordered liberty, tradition could include familiar orders or patterns of liturgy, the inclusion of familiar liturgical components or rituals, or specific prayers from the past. Only Meg specifically articulated order to mean the “traditional call to worship – prayer – prayer of confession – scripture – message – offering – blessing format of a service,” which she considers a set formula (as opposed to “real devotion”).

Order brings structure, familiarity, stability, and functionality to the liturgy, and is a key element of the satisfying flow of the service which many study participants value in worship. Hovda warns against treating elements of the service like they are all interchangeable,

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352 Meg I4.
dispensable, and can be omitted or rearranged at will. He states that decisions like these are made out of “ignorance rather than bravery” as there is “little that is random about the movement, ebb and flow of liturgy.”\textsuperscript{353} He also asserts that when essentials are ignored, what remains can seem like gimmicky, superficial frills.\textsuperscript{354} Deb describes the benefit of order for her: “I found the Wednesday afternoon worship as United Church comfortable. . . . So, when I was comfortable in United Church worship, I was able to open the ears of my heart to God’s call to me. Often times I heard words that helped my struggle with ‘who and what God was calling me to be.’”\textsuperscript{355} The comfortable order of the UCC service freed her to fully engage God’s call to her.

To communicate the “light and power” of the “experience of many ages of devotion . . . marked out by the Apostolic practice and hallowed by the general usage of Christendom,” is to value order and recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit within tradition.\textsuperscript{356} Hal expressed his wish that current students would be “filled with a deep sense of the long, beautiful tradition of the work of the church and the new, unfolding work of God in the world.”\textsuperscript{357} As United Church Formation Director, I share this wish.

In contrast to these positive descriptions of tradition, order was also described in negative terms and often seemed to be valued less than liberty. An excellent example is the earlier quote from Meg who described order as a “set formula” as opposed to “real devotion.” Study respondents represented order as undesirable, lazy, easy, or uninspired. “Unengaging” was another word used to describe order, in addition to “filling in the blanks,” “going through

\textsuperscript{353} Hovda, 23.
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{355} Deb Q6.
\textsuperscript{356} The United Church of Canada, Common Order, iii.
\textsuperscript{357} Hal I17.
the motions,” “people using other people’s words all the time,” and “just formulaic.” Gail and Chloe seemed to experience order as restrictive, referring to it as a liturgical box from which to escape. Chloe wrote, “In the weekly denominational setting, I greatly appreciated the opportunity to step outside the box . . . .” Some students expressed frustration that other students “played it safe” and didn’t stretch themselves in their worship planning and leading.

The focus group OE warned against making the assumption that routine is easy and innovation is hard. This was a source of concern for her for two reasons. First, she thought the opposite could be true in congregational life. Second, she wondered if the valuing of innovation at AST wasn’t setting students up for future congregational ministries where the expectation of opportunities for innovation would not be met. Meg said in her interview, “while I may have wanted something more contemporary, it did train me for the more traditional services that I currently preside over.”

The focus group encouraged current students not to seek formula so much that there is no room for the Holy Spirit, implying that they may understand order to be less spirited than liberty. The OE cautioned against this exclusive equation of spirit with liberty. Meg describes her current worshipping congregation as traditional in its worship life. Yet she experiences worship there as “a time of transformation.” Clearly, the Holy Spirit is present in order too.

Despite the fact that order was less valued than liberty, appreciation for order was expressed by some of the people with the most negative language for it. Although Chloe greatly appreciated the opportunity to step outside the liturgical box, she found creative “out of the box”

358 Hal I5b, Meg I6a, I4c, Hal I3.
359 Chloe Q9b.
360 Meg I9.
worship every week “exhausting” and “sometimes you just want[ed] something familiar.”

Among all the study participants, Hal expressed most clearly an appreciation for order in worship while advocating for liberty.

When I came to AST, sometimes [chapel worship] felt very formulaic, you know? Fill in this prayer, put this hymn in, and ‘tada,’ there is your 20-minute service . . . for me that was actually really refreshing. It was almost monastic in that way. And that, for me, was a really great experience. But for me, in the process of learning this, I almost became really disheartened because it was so formulaic and sometimes I just wanted something way outside the box.

During his time at AST, Hal learned to love the aspects of worship that he associates with order: “[I]n some ways I really learned to love the reflective, meditative simplicity of worship that was traditional. . . . I learned a balance.” He made a point of adding this story to illustrate:

We did Wednesday communion at our church all through Lent this past year. Same service; only switched out the readings and the hymns. Same format, same communion liturgy, everything. And that was something that was, I think, moving and profound for people who were part of that, the small few that showed up. And that’s something that was a technique or a way of being that I learned at AST, that I wouldn’t have had if I had just shown up in a congregation. . . . I would have tried to make every week big or over the top, sometimes forgetting that the repetitiveness is a helpful way of being. It’s a meditation. So, it took me four years to learn that, but slowly it stuck.

Throughout the study, order in worship was described by participants as traditions to be respected and appreciated for their ability to bring structure, familiarity, stability, and functionality to worship. Although less valued than liberty, and sometimes erroneously understood as easier than innovation, many participants understood the importance of order and the balance of order and liberty in worship.

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361 Chloe FG.

362 Hal I4.

363 Hal I4.

364 Hal I5b.
8.2.2 Liberty in Worship

If order is understood most often as traditional worship patterns and elements, how do the study participants understand liberty? Liberty is most often equated with innovation in the study results as evidenced by the use of adjectives such as “contemporary,” “new,” “creative,” and “timely.” However, an alternative understanding of liberty as challenge was also well represented. Respondents used phrases such as “challenging of assumptions,” “a time of disturbance,” “feeling the disjointedness that Jesus invites in our life,” and “challenging our natural inclination toward complacency in our faith.” Hal’s comments flesh out this understanding of liberty, and are reminiscent of Brueggemann’s concept of discontinuity (as noted in chapter 3 of this thesis):

Sometimes worship is disorienting, and it should be disorienting sometimes. . . . When we are confronted with the divine, I think that sometimes that should disorient us. Sometimes we lay hands on people to help channel the spirit and make them feel cared for. And, sometimes we hold hands as we sing a song. So why shouldn’t worship occasionally remind us that the world is not right, that there is much God is angry about? Therefore, why shouldn’t we embody the less comforting parts – like turning tables and blindfolding people? Isaiah 1 has a hint of this – the worship that we have been offering may not always be pleasing to God.365

In her interview, Lee shared a similar sentiment:

Good presiding tries to accomplish worship that’s engaging, but also makes people leave thinking. You don’t want to just give people like, “Yeah, you’re awesome. You’re great. Everything you do is perfect.” You want people to go home and think. How did it challenge them in their coming week to do things differently, to live even better, to treat God’s creation even better? You want them to go home thinking, and if you just send them home with “You are perfect human beings,” then you aren’t doing your job.367

This understanding of liberty as challenge to the status quo is also reminiscent of Hovda, who welcomes the tension between current culture and God’s will. He warns that a “church that

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365 Deb Q6 and Hal I4c, Meg TR10.
366 Hal I4.
367 Lee I10.
simply conforms to the culture ceases to be church. As eschatological sign, it must witness to
the tension between what human society is at any given moment and what the will of God
invites that culture to become.”

Liberty as innovation in worship was valued by the study participants for a number of
reasons. Whether questionnaire respondents favoured the metaphor of worship as learning lab or
not, expectation of innovation in Wednesday worship was consistently expressed. First, the
expectation of innovation exists partly because it is a significant aspect of the ethos of the UCC
in general, and UCC worship in particular. “The ethos of the United Church offers us the
freedom to be creative,” Amy noted. “There is not the prescribed prayer book that must be
followed step by step.”

The assumption that the university setting engenders avant-garde thinking and freedom to experiment is the second reason for the expectation of innovation in worship. Third, for the interviewees, innovation in worship is understood theologically as
bearing witness to God, “who has created and is creating,” and to the Holy Spirit who is
continually at work revealing herself in new expressions, “making all things new.” Amy said,
“The Spirit [is] in flux, in chaos, in constant motion. Nothing is ever staid.” Finally, there is a
biblical rationale for innovation in worship as well. Note that Psalms 96, 98 and 149 pray, “O
sing to God a new song.”

However, innovation in worship is not change for its own sake. Meg said that she
learned that simply doing something new didn’t mean it was good. “It is clear we are stuck in
the UCC as to the format of our services,” she wrote. “But I also could see that just to do
something different didn’t ensure an experience that could be translated well into a weekly

368 Hovda, 16.
369 Amy I4d.
370 The United Church of Canada, “A New Creed,” 918.
church service.” Change needs to serve a broader purpose: bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in this time and place.

The data revealed that liberty was understood in one of two ways, as challenge and as innovation. The commonly-held expectation for innovation in chapel worship was attributed to the university setting, to UCC ethos in general and UCC worship in particular, and to theological understandings that the Holy Spirit “makes all things new.” The study participants’ understandings of the actions of the Holy Spirit in worship beyond order and liberty are considered next.

8.3 The Holy Spirit in Worship

The United Church of Canada claims that the Holy Spirit plays a key role in human life and in worship, as the 1932 Book of Common Order professes: “In our worship we are rightly concerned for two things: first, that a worshipping congregation of the Lord’s people shall be free to follow the leading of the Spirit of Christ in their midst; and secondly, that the experience of many ages of devotion shall not be lost, but preserved — experience that has caused certain forms of prayers to glow with light and power.” Do the study participants operate under the assumption that the Holy Spirit is active in worship? To answer this question, I will report the results of my study within the framework of the four-fold rubric regarding the activity of the Holy Spirit (befriending, opening, empowering, and transfiguring) informed by the work of Rogers.

First, the respondents were quick to identify how they experienced the Holy Spirit’s action of befriending in worship. They experienced God working through them in worship.

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371 Meg Q7a.

372 The United Church of Canada, Common Order, iii.
preparation and leadership, and through members of the congregation, including “the children lighting candles and almost burning their fingers and the congregation listening.”373 Lee said, “There is a letting go and letting God in those moments and they’ll be lots of times when I just pause and feel like I’m listening, ‘What is God saying?’ What is the next thing this congregation right here right now needs?”374 Hal and Meg took comfort in having a theological conviction that God works through them and spite of them. There was an understanding of God being present in worship even if not felt.

Respondents also spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit as “opening.” Hal put it this way: “Good presiding tries to open people’s eyes to the working of God in the world and how God is already working in their lives, to identify where the Spirit is at work and to acknowledge when it is at work.”375 The action of connecting was also a common understanding of the work of the Spirit – connecting presider and congregation, presider and Spirit, congregation and Spirit, and the congregation’s connection with one another.376 The action of connection is a component of Rogers’ understanding of the Holy Spirit’s action of opening. The Holy Spirit opens a way to the Divine to connect humanity with the Divine by collapsing the distance between the two and welcoming creation into the dance of the Trinity. Meg wrote, “In any worship experience God is working to draw us closer to the deepest love known to humankind.”377

Two interviewees expressed how they experience the Holy Spirit empowering them and enlivening the service of worship itself. Amy said, “The presider, in preparation, must be hand

373 Lee, I13.
374 Lee I6d.
375 Hal I10.
376 Amy I10.
377 Meg I6d.
in hand with the Spirit or it’s a performance then and it’s not a living of the Word. The Spirit brings worship ‘off the page’ and gives it life, vitality, the rhythmic flow of a dance. Dare I say the Spirit brings beauty and grace, artistry, to the nuts and bolts mechanics of what I am aware I’m doing?” Meg said, “One thing we all have in common whether we’re presiding or we’re sitting there, is that we have the Holy Spirit within us as our Advocate.”

Finally, Bea and Hal spoke of the Holy Spirit as a change agent in worship, transfiguring or transforming the community toward loving action (in the case of Bea) and justice-seeking action (in the case of Hal.) Bea said in her interview, “What I think the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in worship is drawing the community close together and changing people’s lives, inspiring them too. Some of it’s about personal healing, but it’s also tied to being healers for others, so being encouraged to help others, or to love others. It’s not only through the presider, but I certainly think I have a role in that.” Hal’s comments come out of his learnings from his experience acting out the story of Jesus and the moneylenders:

I hope that God was in the storytelling and the realization that sometimes we turn church into a den of moneylenders and that there is redemption to be had, there’s cleansing to do, and we are invited to be a part of that. . . . There’s a kind of constancy to God and yet this really clever, joker-like, jester God just pops up and changes up and reminds us that not everything is the way that we always think it’s going to be.

In summary, the study participants experienced the Holy Spirit befriending them and the members of their congregations, working through their planning and leading, and sometimes in spite of them. The Holy Spirit was experienced as opening connections between the presider and God, the presider and the congregation, the congregation and the love of God, the members of the congregation to one another, and God’s action in the world to people’s lives. The Holy Spirit

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378 Amy TR13.
379 Meg I13.
380 Hal I4.
was experienced as enlivening the worship experience and empowering the presider. And the Holy Spirit was experienced as transforming the community toward healing, justice-seeking and loving action. However, the participants articulated with greater ease the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within the innovative aspects of UCC chapel worship. One of my wishes for current Formation students is that they are able to clearly articulate their recognition of and appreciation for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within innovation and tradition.

8.4 The Relationship of Order to Liberty in Chapel Worship

How do respondents articulate their understanding of the relationship between order and liberty in UCC chapel worship? First, there is a consistent understanding of needing balance in worship. Kay described it as "a balance between the familiar and the challenging." Amy described it as "a balance between comfort and challenge, historical and contemporary." Hal used the terms "wrestling with the intersection of" and "bumping up against" in his articulation of the relationship between tradition and innovation. For example, he understood his dramatic and disruptive worship service that featured the story about Jesus turning the tables as pushing against the ordered pattern of AST daily worship. Ivy described the relationship as a "mixing" and "negotiating" of the traditional and the contemporary.

Hal also described ordered liberty as "the blending of old worship traditions with new expressions, and infusing the old with new." This latter understanding of marrying the new with the old (instead of a bouncing between that the earlier images might suggest) is represented

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381 Kay Q2.
382 Amy Q6.
383 Hal Q7c.
384 Ivy Q2.
385 Hal Q2.
in Amy and Nora’s comments about telling the old story in a new way. As Nora put it, “The most memorable and meaningful worship services for me have always been when a worship presider’s sermon allowed me to experience the story I’ve heard a thousand times in a new way, like I was hearing it for the first time.”

Placing these understandings of ordered liberty next to Kervin’s interpretation of ordered liberty as a dialectic, it is evident that these participants were striving for language to describe the dynamic process of ordered liberty that characterizes a satisfying UCC worship service. In contrast, statements from other study participants seem to suggest that they viewed ordered liberty in binary (either/or) terms. These participants seemed to think that they must choose one over the other, rejecting one if they favour the other, without understanding the mutual embeddedness of order in liberty, and liberty in order. For example, a traditional prayer, when introduced for the first time, was once a creation of innovation. The same traditional prayer prayed today can be experienced as a fresh expression of ordered liberty if it is chosen to speak to a specific context or pastoral concern. It is important, in my view, for The United Church of Canada to appreciate the beauty in both order and liberty, and to respect the work of the Holy Spirit within both order and liberty. This study reveals that more time needs to be spent with students exploring the beauty in each and their dynamic relationship within UCC worship.

Speaking of UCC worship in terms of the ordering of liberty might also be helpful to students preparing for worship leadership. The term L. Gregory Jones has coined, “traditioned innovation.” could supplement the UCC phrase “ordered liberty.” An advantage to this

386 Amy Q6.
387 Nora Q5b.
approach is that students cannot think of the two dynamics as separate from one another, nor think that choosing one rejects the use of the other. Instead, the nesting of one within the other is always the aim of worship planning, so that the story of the tradition may best be told in the present time. Jones writes, “[T]he narratives of the past, richly shared, can enliven the present and a future.”

Jones is quick to point out, in the words of Pelikan, that tradition is different than traditionalism: “Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living; tradition is the living faith of the dead.” Traditioned innovation means bringing innovation to tradition in ways that “preserve the life-giving character of the tradition.” Innovation that is uncoupled from tradition can create chaos and lead people astray, or impose the leader’s personal beliefs on the congregation’s worship life.

“Transformative change, rooted in tradition and the preservation of wisdom, cultivates the adaptive work that is crucial to the ongoing vitality and growth of any organism, Christian institutions included,” notes Jones. Amy’s description of chapel worship reflects this understanding of traditioned innovation. “In our worship in the AST chapel there is the formula, it mirrors to some extent what one would expect in a church service anywhere in the United Church,” she said in her interview. “So, there is the basic framework but the creativity that can be within that framework, that’s what really excites me. That’s where I like to go, where no one

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390 Jaroslav Pelikan cited in Jones and Armstrong, 131.

391 Jones, “Traditioned Innovation.”

392 Ibid.
has gone before, and just see what happens.” Ordering does not limit or constrain but provides a framework for creativity. “Even our most dramatic transformations,” Jones argues, “ought to be tethered to our most life-giving past.” Amy enthuses, “The joys, oh where do I start? The joys of worship leadership/facilitation. That is what gives me life! Being able to be creative, being able to offer God’s story with just enough of a twist that I don’t lose people, but they’re intrigued and they see things differently.”

The understanding of ordered liberty as traditioned innovation could be helpful in describing formation for ministry as well. Students will always choose innovation as a way of exploring the boundaries of ministry. It is in the exploring of boundaries that one discovers the shape of something. Understanding their exploration as rooted in tradition may reduce the pressure students often feel. The comprehensive tasks of learning, growing, studying, developing, and becoming do not rely only on them personally, for they can rest in something bigger, deeper, and wider as they explore.

8.5 The Dynamic of Ordered Liberty within the Formation Process

As we examine the study data, it must be acknowledged that there was a wide range of views among alumni/ae about the importance of their participation in UCC worship for their formation as worship leaders. Meg and Nora represent this range. In her questionnaire, Meg wrote, “It was not in this setting that I gained new knowledge,” while Nora offered, “I was pretty much a blank slate when I came to AST and chapel worship was just as formative for me as any of my field placements.” Taking into consideration this variation in learning among study participants, the research data reveals two different kinds of learning from chapel experiences.

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393 Amy I4c.

394 Jones, “Traditioned Innovation.”

395 Amy I9.
These two kinds of learning were aptly described by our Outside Expert in the focus group, using a metaphor from the natural sciences: namely, the making of sedimentary rock and the making of volcanic rock. For the making of sedimentary rock, an almost imperceptible layering happens over a long period of time, building up the sand layers grain by grain, and slowly solidifying until sandstone is formed. This metaphor represents the cultivation of habitus, the learning that occurs through observation and repetition, often unconsciously, but nonetheless resulting in new ways of being. In contrast, basalt (volcanic rock) is formed when lava forcefully erupts, exploding toward the earth’s surface, then quickly cools into hard dramatic columns. The metaphor of the creation of basalt represents transformative learning events, those shocking moments that disrupt our current understandings and that force us to consider new ways of understanding and being. Let us first explore how the study participants understood formation as the cultivation of habitus or the making of sedimentary rock.

8.5.1 Learning as the Cultivation of Habitus

In chapter 3, we learned the importance of the cultivation of habitus as foundational to formation for ministry. This kind of learning is enculturalization, the natural transmission of knowledge, behaviours, values, and attitudes that develops habits of seeing, thinking, doing, and being that take root in a minister’s bones. Full immersion into the life and worship practices of a community; how language is used; how people interact with each other; and relationships with role models are key ways that habitus is cultivated. This kind of learning was demonstrated in the stories of Formation worship shared by the study participants who described it as an unconscious kind of learning that was simply absorbed or that seeped in through repetition and

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396 Westerhoff, 140-1.
observation of others leading chapel worship. Such learning is like “seeds that were planted without being noticed at the time.”

Joy is one of the study participants who articulated her understanding of the impact of UCC Formation on her formation for ministry as the cultivation of habitus. She speaks of the process as one of absorption, writing that “The unique way of Formation, with its relaxed and personal style, lessens the stress on students so that they sometimes forget that it’s a classroom of learning, and thus information regarding planning, leading, and reflecting are simply absorbed. Without [Wednesday] Formation, and knowing that God walked with me, I’m not sure that I could have survived the constant judgment that I felt with other environments of the school.” Students absorbed varieties of worship approaches, types of worship leadership, noted what they liked and didn’t like, and discovered what they found engaging and life-giving, or not helpful.

For Hal, the learning in Formation “seeped its way in.”

I think what chapel worship gave me was all of those little things that you just pick up intuitively by doing it again and again. And they’re so small and unspoken but they can make such a difference. You’re preparing for the benediction but you put down your hymn book half a verse early to go and pick up the candle so that you’re ready. It’s so small but you pick that up. You pick up skills on communicating with your musician. You pick up skills on what works for prayers of the people and what doesn’t. There’s something about the repetitive practice, because you do get a lot of opportunities. You also see when other people fail or succeed. In those first two years, I was probably at a hundred different services. You pick up a lot in that time. It’s an intense immersion experience. I think probably unconsciously that I was picking up stuff all the time.

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397 Otis FG.
398 Joy Q6.
399 Lee Q6 and 7c.
400 Hal I4a.
401 Hal I6a.
Hal admitted that many of the things he learned this way were small things, but he also considered them to be important things.

In addition to worship leadership skills, Hal was also unconsciously exploring his identity as a worship presider by “playing with the identities, ideas, and mannerisms” of the people around him. As Ivy put it, “Mentorship is powerful in chapel worship.” Respondents identified their fellow students, guest ministers, faculty, and staff as mentors for their worship leadership. Observing other worship leaders was also a way for Hal to check whether he was the norm or outside the norm. Over time, Hal found his approach to worship became less “extreme.” For Chloe, the practice of daily prayer was habit-forming: “I think the need to develop a habit of daily devotion is vital for a healthy life in ministry, and I see daily chapel as providing an opportunity to develop this habit.”

The largely unconscious nature of formation was evident in Meg’s questionnaire and interview results. As seen earlier, Meg stated in her questionnaire that she hadn’t learned much in Formation. However, in her interview she identified a couple of areas of learning that I would characterize as cultivating habitus. She said, “You learn just by having the experience, you know, as far as helping to serve communion and those things, and that’s important. . . . Well, I think I was formed in some sense, but I’m honestly having a hard time putting a finger on what that would have been. Just by having an experience over and over again you’re shaped somewhat.” Other respondents echo the impact on repetition. “Practice, practice, practice”

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402 Ivy Q7c.
403 Chloe Q9a.
404 Meg I6c.
helped to make students “better worship planners, leaders, speakers, and pray-ers.” The notion of repetition corresponds well with the metaphor of sediment gathering to form the rock.

UCC Worship was an opportunity for Meg to use some of the skills she developed in Field Education and elsewhere. But Meg couldn’t say that her participation in chapel worship transformed her. She didn’t think her identity and spirituality as a presider were shaped by her time in chapel worship: “This is likely because I could not separate myself from the fact that I approached chapel worship, whether attending or leading, as a worship experience rather than a learning experience.” When asked in her interview what kind of impact the UCC worship services she attended at AST had on her, Meg said:

I’m not sure that we can expect to have something earth-shattering or transformative happen when basically we’re having a service that we’re all familiar with and not stretched by... You may once in a while but I’m not sure it’s realistic to expect that it’s going to be a deep impactful experience. I don’t know where it would come from, you know, a really impactful thing, unless it’s just done really well as in the one service I would say was just an outstanding service... Not to discount the whole experience altogether, I don’t mean that, but I don’t know that in the chapel itself we learn a lot of new material. So, for me as a student, when I was a student, I’m not sure that I’m learning in chapel and I’m not sure that I’m supposed to learn in chapel. To me it’s just not so much about learning: it’s more about relationship.

Is what Meg said true? Can we only expect the kind of learning to take place in UCC Formation worship to be the cultivation of habitus or what Brueggemann describes as “continuity?” Or can we expect participation in UCC worship at AST to be a transformative event for students’ development as worship leaders in The United Church of Canada? To begin to address these questions we return to the concept of learning as the formation of the volcanic rock (basalt,) Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, and Lee’s chapel story.

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405 Ivy Q7b and Hal Q7b.

406 Meg Q7c.

407 Meg I18.
8.5.2 Learning as Transformative De/Re/Formation

The questions that erupted for Lee after witnessing the telling of Jesus turning the tables are, in my opinion, representative of Mezirow’s understanding of a disorienting dilemma that disrupts one’s current frame of reference and causes one to re-examine assumptions. Lee said, “I left that chapel service feeling very unsettled. Nothing about it felt like worship that I knew, and I’d had quite a few different or unique worship experiences under my belt at this point. . . . It was so different than anything I’ve ever experienced and so confusing. . . . I was so unsure how to feel about it, so unsure about the space that had been created.” 408 Lee’s feelings of confusion and uncertainty are typical of a disorienting dilemma. She critically reflected on this experience by entering into dialogue with students and faculty in the classroom and at the lunch table, and with God in prayer. Through this worship experience and her reflection upon it, Lee came to a new understanding that worship ought to include an element of challenge. Lee’s story is a story of transformative learning.

Other study participants write about their understanding of worship as “disorienting,” an understanding that they have carried with them from AST to their pastoral charges. Hal writes, “I think that the purpose of the [worship] leader is to help the people feel that love of God (which I must say is sometimes very disorienting) through the prayers, worship, sermon, atmosphere, visuals, etc.” 409 Finn notes, “I am a worship leader who attempts to push the boundaries of my worshippers to help them think critically about their faith.” 410 Other references the research data reveals that relate to transformative learning concepts include Amy learning at AST that she needed to “check her assumptions;” the Focus Group urging current

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408 Lee I4c.
409 Hal Q3.
410 Finn Q4.
students to “let go” of what worship elements “must” look like; and Joy digging “deep into her being and realiz[ing] she had work to do.” Hal found himself to be “very disoriented” for a good part of his first year of theological studies. Pushing boundaries, questioning assumptions, letting go of previously held convictions, feeling disoriented, digging deep into one’s being: these are all components of de/re/formation.

For Joy, Wednesday Formation was the mediator for what she clearly understands as transformative learning. She writes:

Although I’m not sure that I let it be known at the time, Formation was the place where much growth occurred. With continued involvement, I was able to “let go” of much of my human conditioning and allow God’s presence to surface in a way that was and is so helpful in relating and caring for others while still caring for myself. Formation played a huge part in helping me to shape a “new identity” as minister to a congregation and often to others whom I come in contact with during my daily routine.

To conclude, there is evidence of two kinds of learning in the research study data. The first is reminiscent of Brueggemann’s “continuity,” or the cultivation of habitus, represented by the image of the creation of sandstone. The second kind of learning is represented by the image of the creation of basalt, a volcanic rock. Although not as common as the first, transformative de/re/formation or “disruptive,” “volcanic” learning did occur, resulting in significant discoveries for study participants. The role of the Holy Spirit in the process of formation is our next topic to consider.

8.6 The Holy Spirit in Formation

Jones writes, “Staying open to the Spirit means preparing ourselves to be disrupted by the wild, beautiful, transformational work of God’s Spirit that blows where the Spirit will and

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411 Joy Q7c.
412 Hal Q6.
413 Joy Q7c.
leads us places we did not intend – or often even want – to go."414 Was there evidence in the study results that participants understood Holy Spirit to be acting among them, transforming them into the ministers that God would have them be?

In addition to the Holy Spirit’s activity in the worship event, respondents commonly spoke of the Holy Spirit working through people, situations, and experiences to accomplish God’s work in their formation as worship leaders. Lee’s comment is representative of this understanding: “I often felt God working through other people. . . . I felt God there for sure.”415 A greater understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work of befriending would, I argue, help to ease students’ fear and competition with self and others.

Respondents also often spoke of their eyes being opened by the Spirit to broaden their worship horizons. The Holy Spirit opened their eyes to other worship styles and theologies, to and the realization that “my way” is not necessarily the “right way” or the “only way.” This is crucial to the process of formation, which seeks to integrate a student’s person and gifts within a context of living communal faith. “I went to worship with my eyes wide open,” Otis wrote, “that I might see what the Holy Spirit had to teach me through my colleagues.”416 There was a strong sense that the Holy Spirit inhabits the space between the traditions, inspiring new respect for different ways.

Respondents also felt empowered by the Spirit as they gained in knowledge, honed their skills, and found confidence. Amy spoke of it in this way: “I’m hoping that God saw me as a willing participant that could open wider doors, open bigger eyes. As a result of my experience

414 Jones, “Seven Tips.”

415 Lee I4g.

416 Otis Q9b.
here, and the confidence that that gave me, God is continuing to work through me.”\textsuperscript{417} Otis’ statement about the Holy Spirit’s empowerment of worship applies to Formation as well. He wrote that worship “isn’t just something I plan and deliver, but something that worshipers and worship leaders create together with the inspiration of the Holy.”\textsuperscript{418} I would argue that if Formation students adopted this attitude, they would understand themselves more fully as co-creators of the learning community rather than consumers of course material.

Finally, respondents credited the Holy Spirit with their transformation into the ministers and worship leaders they have become, from “performer” to “vessel of God’s grace.”\textsuperscript{419} To consider further the transformative process of formation, I have gathered all the stories of learning from the interviews, and constructed a diagram of the formation process. We next turn our attention to what stands between a significant worship experience and the student’s new insight or learning.

\textbf{8.7 Mapping the Learning Process}

Based on the interviewees’ stories of their processing of significant worship experiences, I have created the following figure to represent the learning process.

\textsuperscript{417} Amy I6d.

\textsuperscript{418} Otis Q7c.

\textsuperscript{419} Deb Q6, Ivy Q3.
When I examined all that stood between each participant’s worship experiences and their new understandings, I found that there were first of all internal or external factors that influenced or challenged their current understanding of worship or worship leadership. As the diagram indicates, the categories of internal and external factors/challenges overlap, because they are interconnected. Internal factors are things like personality traits, expectations, feelings, previous experiences or lack of previous experience, natural defensiveness, and questions.
External factors include the physical space, program structure, ethos of UCC worship and chapel worship at AST, and the actions of classmates, faculty, staff, and guests. All these factors are influential and can present challenges to a student. For example, Bea was challenged by her internal anxiety about planning, preparing, and leading communion for the first time.

In order for learning to take place, a response or intervention occurred to address the challenge. Bea undertook research and thorough preparation to move through her anxiety about the leading the service. Such responses or interventions can also be either internal or external, and they create dialogue, whether an internal dialogue, or an external formal or informal dialogue among program participants. Self-talk or personal prayer is an example of informal internal dialogue, while completing a reflection paper is an example of a formal internal dialogue. Examples of formal external dialogues are classroom conversations or written feedback forms; and informal external dialogues could be the sharing of unsolicited feedback or lunch table conversations about a worship experience.

The lines in the diagram are dotted from the internal/external challenges because if it is not addressed, a challenge can prevent the worship experience from becoming a learning experience. For example, if one wishes that worship would never be evaluated, then one may resist debriefing the experience. This challenge may never be overcome, unless an external intervention is imposed, such as a reflection assignment. Meg wrote, “I was more of a worshipper than a student when I was in chapel so perhaps I wasn’t as open to being formed by it or learn by it.”\textsuperscript{420} The external intervention (in the form of the request of the worship leaders for Meg to complete a feedback form) opened the door to her learning. Note also in the diagram that the lines have arrows in both directions, because movement can come from either direction. The learning process can also involve an ongoing movement back and forth between the

\textsuperscript{420} Meg Q9b.
challenge and the response as a new insight is formed. The process is dialectical, rather than
cause-and-effect.

The result of the internal and external dialogue is new insight or learning, new
knowledge, skill, identity or spirituality. It could also be, in contrast, an affirmation of a
previously held conviction. The scale of the challenge and the resulting new learning, and how
well integrated it is into a student’s doing and being, will determine whether the learning is
transformative or unfolds as the cultivation of habitus. The learner then carries this new
understanding into their next worship experience, layering big and small learnings on top of
each other like the layers of sand that form the sandstone. We will consider a possible future
application of this diagram in the final chapter of the thesis.

8.8 Summary

As we have seen in this chapter, although study participants named the balancing of
order and liberty as important in UCC worship, liberty was valued more than order, and the
Holy Spirit was associated more with liberty than order. Some of the participants advocated for
the balancing of order and liberty either by bouncing between old traditions and fresh
expressions, or by blending the old with the new. However, a significant number of participants
seemed to think that they had to reject one if they chose the other, not recognizing the
interdependence of order and liberty. As a result, a new term, “traditioned innovation,” was
introduced. This expression may help students understand more clearly the beauty and value of
both order and liberty; recognize the dialectical interdependence of order and liberty; and
respect more fully the work of the Holy Spirit within both order and liberty.

The study participants’ experiences of the process of formation were explored using the
metaphor of ordered liberty. Learning experiences of continuity or shaping of habitus were
categorized as order, and learning experiences of discontinuity or de/re/formation were
categorized as liberty. Both were evident in the data, although the shaping of habitus associated
with order was more common than transformative learning associated with liberty. The Holy
Spirit was understood as befriending, opening, empowering, and transforming in both the
worship experiences of the study participants and their learning. Finally, a visual representation
of the learning process was drawn in light of the study participants’ worship stories. A future
application of this diagram is proposed in the next and final chapter.
Chapter 9
Future Directions

9.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I look to the future and the possible impact of this research study on the formation of United Church of Canada students as effective worship leaders. As we consider the possible applications of this study, caution must be taken in the generalization of these research results. The sample size in the study is a small one and the situation of UCC Formation worship in the Atlantic School of Theology chapel is unique in that it is not voluntary, but a central component of a required program. That being said, educators at other theological schools might find it helpful for their own work. Study participants themselves have already reported benefitting from the study. The process of reflecting on where they are now as worship leaders and how they got there has generated a sense of appreciation for and a renewed interest in worship, as well as renewed intentionality in their worship planning and leading.\(^{421}\) The descriptive accounts of students’ experiences of worship in the AST chapel has yielded significant insights and inspired concrete actions for my ministry as United Church Formation Director at AST.

This chapter begins with a summary of the impact chapel worship has had on study participants’ current worship leadership. Then the varied tensions that students must navigate in chapel worship are outlined. Areas that could benefit from additional teaching are proposed, including the sharing of my learning process diagram, and the introduction of the metaphor of chapel worship as playground. Areas that could benefit from additional research are identified next. The chapter concludes with a list of summary actions and a final word.

\(^{421}\) Otis FG and Hal TR.
9.2 Impact of Chapel Worship on Current Worship Leadership

The results of this study demonstrate that AST chapel worship was one of many formative experiences for the participants in the research study. For some, the impact was more significant than for others. Amy said that her participation in UCC worship had “a moderate impact” because she came to theological school with so much worship leadership experience, and yet her experience was “valuable.” Bea reported that chapel worship was “just the start of shaping her identity as a worship leader.” Lee wrote, “Taking part in these worship services over my three years of study at AST was significant and formative, and something I am grateful for.” Many students reported the ecumenical aspect of daily chapel worship at AST to be valuable to their training for ministry. Study participants appreciated the opportunities for learning afforded by their ecumenical worship planning and leadership teams. They learned about navigating differences in theologies and approaches to liturgy through such experiences. They learned about the United Church through their encounters with other denominational traditions, and they recognized the influence of their daily (ecumenical) chapel experiences on their UCC Formation (Wednesday) worship experiences. However, as I consider future directions, I will limit my suggestions to UCC Formation worship, because ecumenical chapel worship is beyond my purview as UCC Formation Director and beyond the scope of this study.

Keeping these considerations before us, what conclusions can be drawn from the study? First, the study results show that chapel worship experiences impact students’ future ministries in a variety of ways. These experiences formed them as worship leaders, developing a range of knowledge and skills, and to a lesser extent, shaping their identity and spirituality as worship

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422 Amy I16.
423 Bea I6c.
424 Lee TR.
presiders. Participation in chapel worship also built their confidence and gave them ideas to try in their pastoral charges. As Nora wrote, “Leading worship and preaching in front of peers and professors is the most stressful thing of life. Once you get through leading worship with 20-30 of your classmates, a 600 people-in-attendance-packed-to-rafters-Christmas Eve service in a congregation is a picnic.” Lee said that faculty encouragement to experiment in worship class prepared her for the reality of weekly Sunday worship: “In those worship foundations classes, we were really challenged to do something completely off-the-wall different and see how it goes. Maybe it will fall flat. That’s going to be your learning experience because you’re not going to hit it out of the park every Sunday and you need to know that now.” Wednesday Worship also impacted Amy in another way. She brought her positive “learning lab” experience from AST to her pastoral charge. “The concept of learning lab continues as I continue to experiment and push at boundaries,” she noted. “My worship leadership is constantly expanding thanks in part to my positive experience at AST.”

A significant insight from the research was the impact of silence on a student’s future worship leadership. The study participants’ stories revealed that students interpret silence as permission. When asked about the faculty’s influence on her chapel experience, Amy replied, “I only felt encouragement, or maybe I had blinders. There was nobody who ever said, ‘You went too far.’ Because I wasn’t shut down at AST, that has allowed me to bring that freedom to where I am now.” This insight alone is a persuasive argument for continuing the pattern of offering feedback and encouraging reflection on chapel worship despite the many tensions that the study participants felt during their time at AST.

425 Nora Q6.
426 Lee I4e.
427 Amy TR.
9.3 Navigating Tensions in Chapel Worship

Among the tensions that study participants felt while at AST were difficulty receiving feedback (especially in the first year before they’d had a chance to “grow a thicker skin”) and receiving unhelpful feedback. Time pressures, the stress of leading peers and faculty, and feeling judged or “under a microscope” also created tension. Conflict between personalities, theologies, and traditions all played a role as well. Gail wrote:

I think theological school chapel is optimally a spiritual practice. But one that can be reflected on prayerfully in order to help leaders explore/grow their gifts: if done right this reflection can be like a spiritual practice in itself. If approached in the wrong way, and I have seen this happen in Preaching class and sometimes in Formation Feedback sheets, reflecting on someone’s leadership can be less prayerful and actually more like an episode of American Idol where Simon is judging.

Although these tensions can be stressful, they aren’t necessarily negative. Some are intrinsic to the context. For example, a theological school is in part a worshipping community, but it is not only that. It is also a learning community. Students and staff worship together, but are also accountable to each other for the processes of learning and teaching. Some tensions are essential to the effectiveness of the learning process. Finn wrote, “it was helpful to be able to work with leaders of all different personalities and learn how to put together a service for your peers.”

Learning from chapel experiences is praxis-based learning; in other words, it is action – reflection – action learning. Students need experiences of working with people who have differing beliefs in order to learn how to work with people with dissimilar approaches and how to create worship collaboratively. Creating worship collaboratively is essential to living out a theological understanding of worship as the work of the people. Therefore, working in worship teams is an essential practice in the UCC Formation program. Witvliet holds up the importance

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428 Gail Q9a.
429 Finn Q6.
of shaping a community that encourages collaborative worship, practicing the skills that
students will need as they collaborate with others in their congregations to prepare worship.\textsuperscript{430}

The stress of leading in front of peers and faculty and receiving feedback from them is
also essential to “learning that the world won’t fall apart if something isn’t received the way you
imagined,” something that Amy found to be valuable learning. In order to learn this, Amy
needed experiences of leading her peers and access to how others received what she did.\textsuperscript{431}

Tensions were also revealed in the split of opinions concerning the processes of sharing
of feedback and doing reflection together that are currently in place in UCC Formation. Meg
advocated for the cessation of the formal feedback forms and the reflection process. She feels
that constructive criticism, though helpful, can be divisive, and that it wouldn’t be possible to
get good feedback from peers because they want to be “kind” to one another. She would prefer
that the current process be replaced by informal debriefing conversations among the worship
team members. She feels that the Spirit might work through the students more if they have a
feeling of “safety/sanctuary” during worship. She also thinks that having to complete feedback
forms takes one out of worship mode. “I didn’t see the value in peer evaluation,” she wrote.
“Rather I saw it as something where feedback was too general so as not to offend anyone or
even if the intent was to be constructive, it often served to separate us and add stress to our
relationships as students.”\textsuperscript{432}

In comparison, most students appreciated receiving feedback to help them understand
their successes and failures. In fact, some relied on it. It gave them the freedom to experiment
because they knew that they would learn from others what worked and what did not work. Some

\textsuperscript{430} Witvliet, 121-122.

\textsuperscript{431} Amy I4e.

\textsuperscript{432} Meg Q8.
expressed appreciation for the opportunity to fill out feedback forms for other worship leaders because it gave them the opportunity to reflect more intentionally on the service. Bea noted that the reflection assignments make sure that reflection happens in the busyness of the term. Nora wrote, “We all knew directly or indirectly, evaluations were happening when it was our turn to lead worship. But that didn’t take away from the worshipfulness of the experience. In fact, in the long run, the things that worked and resonated with other students who gave us feedback that could later be repeated in a congregational setting ultimately benefitted the future congregation!”

A few study participants called for more sharing of feedback. “I wish that there was more feedback peer-to-peer,” Hal noted. “I would have loved time to debrief worship each week for feedback beyond forms. Realistically, in congregational worship, you get lots of feedback—sometimes in person, sometimes through gossip and rarely through evaluation forms.” The focus group members recognized that weekly sharing would be stressful in the beginning but that “it would be worth it.” This echoes what Deb suggested in her questionnaire: “I feel, in retrospect, that a time of sharing how we each felt, while painful, might have been pain well worth the gain.” Weekly sharing would cultivate in students an improved capacity and ability for giving and receiving feedback.

Recognizing that some tensions are inherent to the context and essential for learning, others could be mitigated. As Ivy wrote, “We saw the good bad and ugly and still loved each other through our successes and foibles.” How students “love each other” through their

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433 Nora Q9b.
434 Hal Q9b.
435 Deb Q6.
436 Ivy Q6.
successes and foibles impacts the amount of stress students feel in UCC Formation and chapel worship. When Bea was asked what planning and leading worship meant for her when she was a student, she replied, “I remember being extremely anxious about it. At some times almost losing sleep about it, or almost crying about it. It seems funny now but it was also really positive. I liked the collaboration. It meant working with others which was really positive, learning from classmates as well as faculty members, and it built my confidence.” We will return to possible strategies for moving through stress later in the chapter.

9.4 Areas for Additional Teaching

This research study also identified areas in which students could benefit from additional teaching. Participants’ comments revealed their robust understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit befriending, opening, empowering, and transforming in worship. More attention in the Formation program to the work of the Holy Spirit as transfiguring would enhance students’ understanding of worship and the process of formation. It would also underline Formation as a sacred space, countering the (minority) opinion of the Formation program as an extra responsibility. The struggle some study participants had with articulating their understanding of their identity and spirituality as presider leads me to believe that more exploration of the role of presider would be beneficial. Considering a variety of metaphors for presiding, especially at the sacraments, might be an effective approach to this. Finally, sharing with students the findings from this research concerning the learning process would bring to consciousness this process and enable them to enter it with more intentionality.
9.4.1 Introducing the Learning Process Diagram

Palmer asserts that consciousness precedes being. Therefore, consciousness can “form, deform, or reform our world.” Accordingly, I constructed a diagram of the learning process witnessed in the study participants’ stories of learning so that I might share it with the current UCC Formation students (Figure 2, above). Pairing my learning process diagram with Mezirow’s work on transformative learning will provide ample opportunity for program participants to discuss not only the process of formation, but also the purpose of formation and the goals toward which the Formation Group is working. It would give students a common language and greater potential for common understanding as they approach the tasks of attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on chapel worship. They can become more mindfully aware of the process they are in, and more fully embrace the learning opportunities before them. They can recognize that the tensions they feel are normal, even desired, and this recognition will help them remain courageous in the face of anxiety. They can become more intentional about shaping a community that supports its members as they navigate the ambiguous, multifaceted complexity of UCC worship in the AST chapel. Finally, sharing this learning process diagram could contribute to the creation of a positive learning environment that provokes, facilitates, and “regulates the heat” for students, our next topic of discussion.

9.4.2 Provoking Learning

In Chapter 3, we saw the importance of the role of provocateur in the transformative learning process. The fact that study participants felt provoked in their time in AST chapel worship is indicated in the words they chose to describe their experiences: challenging, dislocating, expansive, intense, frightening, uncomfortable, frustrating, anxious, and eye-

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opening. Mezirow delegates the responsibility to provoke to the educator. However, my research and analysis suggests that the role of provocateur is shared in the theological school among the worship experience itself, peers, faculty, student worship leaders, and student worshippers.

As we witnessed in Lee’s story earlier, the worship experience itself provoked Lee’s learning. Other study participants recognized the potential for the worship experience to act as provocateur as well. Finn wrote, “All I can say is that worship can be done in so many ways. Some ways make you feel uncomfortable (not necessarily a bad thing) and some make you feel the opposite.” Joy pointed out that anything done for the first time is an experiment.

Also evident in my findings was the expectation that student peers would take on the role of provocateur. When Hal was asked to summarize the impact of the 72 worship services he attended on Wednesday afternoons, he said: “I looked forward to them because it felt more comfortable than the other ones. . . [But] I wanted people to step outside their comfort zone. I wanted to be pushed and challenged and inspired. Sometimes it happened, but often it didn’t.” Hal wanted his peers to act as provocateur for his learning and was disappointed when he felt pressured by his worship teammates to just “fill in the blanks.” Otis and Finn expressed appreciation to their peers for challenging them. Otis was challenged on several occasions to pray extemporaneously, and Finn’s peers pushed him to “think outside the box.”

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438 Sample responses to the interview and focus group introductory question: “Which two or three words would characterize your experience in AST chapel?”

439 Finn Q7a.

440 Joy Q9a.

441 Hal I.

442 Otis Q7b and Finn Q8.
Faculty and staff were experienced as provocateurs to a lesser extent. Lee witnessed this in her ecumenical chapel team when the faculty member of the team asked the group why they wanted to do something a certain way and if they were “sure” that they wanted to do it that way.\textsuperscript{443} Otis experienced the Formation Director as encouraging creativity in planning worship.

Finally, several study participants shared how they challenged themselves in chapel worship. Lee’s comment is representative of this understanding of self as provocateur.

Sally: What did planning and leading worship mean for you when you were a student?

Lee: It meant pushing myself a little bit. There’s the pressure a little bit of leading worship in front of peers and in front of teachers. You always felt this wanting to present your best self, but also challenge yourself to do something that you felt would be worthy in some way. I also felt okay to experiment and receive feedback in that space. It was sort of after my first semester that I really got comfortable with that, knowing that it’s okay to try new things, to try new music, to lead in a way that is not what I grew up knowing. . . and really engage in something completely different than I was used to. . . I had grown up only knowing one style of worship so it was really a bit eye-opening and also a really great time to grow and learn in doing different things differently.\textsuperscript{444}

As tempting as it might be to avoid provocation and the feelings of dis-ease that accompany it, current students were encouraged to embrace it by the members of the focus group. They reinforced Hal and Amy’s earlier advice to current students to be “filled with creativity and courage,” and “take risks all the time.”\textsuperscript{445}

\textbf{9.4.3 Facilitating Safety}

According to Mezirow’s model of transformative learning, in addition to the role of provocateur, the educator functions as a facilitator. As facilitator, the educator shapes a hospitable space for group learning, fostering healthy group process, encouraging student engagement in reflective discourse, drawing out new learning through discussion of good

\textsuperscript{443} Lee I4e.

\textsuperscript{444} Lee I3.

\textsuperscript{445} Hal I17, Amy I17.
questions, and introducing resources. Respondents in this study reported the importance of the student community for facilitating safety and supporting them in their learning. Amy wrote,

For me, theological school chapel worship ought to be the research laboratory – a safe and supportive place in which to practice the art of worship design and leadership, experimenting with creative and innovative elements. Being risk-taking with liturgy and stretching one’s self as a worship leader are skills that I believe the Spirit asks us to develop, if we are to help invigorate faith communities that seem tired.

When asked what makes the learning environment safe and supportive, Amy replied, “friendly, trusting relationships with students and faculty; a ‘we’re all in this together’ mentality, that is, the belief that everyone (students and faculty) wants all students to learn and grow; and belief that feedback would be honest and delivered with care.” Amy also recognized that the degree of risking and stretching varied among students depending on their sense of safety: “In attending worship, I was pleased when some students ‘risked’ and I regretted the missed opportunity when others seemed to ‘play it safe.’ However, to be fair, I recognize that perhaps some students who were new to worship leadership needed to become comfortable with the ‘norm’ before they could develop the courage to experiment.”

As noted earlier, Bea also lifts up the importance of student peers in creating a good learning environment. She wrote, “I think the students create that a lot by supporting each other through hav[ing] a genuine desire to learn, address[ing] problems directly rather than complaining, pray[ing] together, attend[ing] worship, and try[ing] to be a good listener and encourage each other.” Otis identified the sharing of helpful feedback as a key way that his
peers facilitated his learning. “Risk-taking is good. You might soar; you might fall. Your peers are there to catch you with honest and helpful feedback.” He went on: “We supported each other as we continuously praised God, in lots of unique ways.”

Another source of facilitating safety is the worship team. There was a sense of safety in numbers. Kay wrote, “I enjoyed the experiences of working with a team because of the support of others. It helped ease me into leading worship.” Is there a way the worship team could be more effectively utilized as a resource for learning?

For Joy, it was the “uplifting, inspirational and warmly supportive community spirit” that facilitated her learning. She wrote:

Formation held a kind, warm, accepting atmosphere that spoke to peoples’ need to feel accepted. With time, this allowed me to let go and submit to the truth in criticism, thus accepting suggestions of change as positive without being defensive. I learned to lean into what was intended as constructive criticism rather than putting up blocks of defence. Formation was an environment that encouraged learning, change, and growth. . . . Formation was a community who experienced unconditional acceptance and spirituality together.

Faculty and the Formation Director were also identified as being supportive of student learning. In her interview, Lee spoke about how her attitude to receiving feedback changed over the course of her studies and the place of faculty:

At that point I was so comfortable and okay with feedback. I mean when you first get there you’re like, “I don’t want anyone to tell me I did something wrong. I don’t want

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451 Otis FG.
452 Otis Q8.
453 Kay Q9b.
454 Joy Q6.
455 Joy Q8.
456 Otis Q8 and Lee I4e.
anyone to give me feedback that might make me feel bad about myself.” And by the time you’re in your third year, you’re like, “Give it to me. I’ve been on a year of internship now. Just tell me what you think. I may say, ‘I don’t care.’ I may say ‘Great. I’ll do it differently next time’ or ‘I’ll work on that.’” So there’s the learning from first year to third year – you grow a thicker skin about it. . . . And you just learn that people aren’t criticizing you. They’re not saying, “You did it wrong.” They’re saying, “In my 20, 30 years of experience, here’s what I’ve seen, here’s what could be helpful for you.” Some had a better way of saying it than others.457

9.4.4 Balancing Provoking and Facilitating – Regulating the Heat

The art of teaching, according to Mezirow, is in the balancing of the roles of provocateur (which challenges or makes harder) and facilitator (which comforts or makes easier). Heifetz’s term for this balancing act is “regulating the heat.” Sometimes the leader must turn the heat up, and sometimes the leader must turn the heat down, so that participants can stay engaged in the process. “Adaptive leaders ‘regulate the heat,’” Heifetz notes, “so that the situation becomes neither too explosive nor too lethargic.”458

Given that students report so much stress inherent to their chapel experiences of leadership amongst peers, and their own formation for ministry, how might the heat be regulated in ways that ensure students’ sense of safety and preserve their openness and ability to learn? In this section, I propose six ways of doing so.

First, the work of learning must be paced at a speed and intensity that can be tolerated. Ivy found that the occasional responsibility of writing reflection papers and providing written feedback for other students, rather than providing it for every service, helped to make the work manageable in a busy term: “We did a lot of work on constructive feedback models, and not

457 Lee l6.

everyone evaluated each service. . . . Allowing students to evaluate empowered us for critical thinking in worship. **459**

Secondly, senior students could, as the focus group suggested, model for new students the giving and receiving of feedback. This could be an effective way of providing orientation and instruction. Concentrating worship reflections for the first and second year students in the winter term allows time in the fall term for them to gain a sense of safety before they are required to solicit feedback from their peers. It also gives students more opportunities to get to know one another and allow classmates to better tailor their communication to each individual’s needs.

A third way to regulate the heat of stressful learning is to use language about chapel worship that embraces the ambiguity and complexity of the context, gently encourages the stretching of wings, normalizes “failure,” and emphasizes how profoundly the process of learning is a communal venture. To fail is part of the human condition. Palmer describes human lives as “experiments with truth.” In experiments, negative results are as important as successes. Humans learn the truth about themselves through mistakes as well as successes. **460** Like Palmer, Heifetz believes that his students learn best from their own experience, especially experiences of failure. Moving through experiences of success and failure together in conversation with one another is essential to learning. Successful learning is amplified by the interconnectivity of the community of learners.

A fourth strategy is to help students to understand that safety does not mean “easy” or “unimportant.” The fear that students may feel from time to time needs to be acknowledged.
Knowing that fear is a normal response also has the effect of turning down the heat. Palmer states that everyone has fear, including leaders. He doesn’t suggest that one should or could somehow eliminate fear but that we do not need to “be the fear we have.” Rather than leading from the places of fear within, leaders can lead from places of “trust and hope and faith” instead. They may still tremble, but they stand on supportive ground.461

Heifetz’s recommendation about the leader giving the work back to the group “without abandoning them” is a fifth helpful strategy for coping with the stress of learning.462 This encourages students to puzzle out situations, notice their own unexamined expectations, and strengthen their skills in discernment. Groups sometimes utilize unconscious methods to avoid the potential pain, conflict, anxiety, or grief that can accompany transformative learning, including blaming and scapegoating, creating a distraction, insistence on maintaining established procedures, or simply tuning out. Presenting good questions is an effective way to give the work back to the group, because questions require people to think for themselves. As Parks notes, “Good questions invite and focus attention, surface important issues, and assist people in learning to see what they most need to see in their own past and emergent experience.”463 I plan to revisit and adjust the questions in the written worship reflection assignment, and to carefully shape questions to generate future classroom discussions about worship and worship leadership, keeping in mind that no learning environment or process is perfect. The data gathered in my research demonstrates the range of knowledge, skills, experience, beliefs, and expectations that students bring with them to UCC Formation worship.

In addition, students differ in terms of their learning styles, their commitment to the program,

461 Ibid., 94.

462 Parks, 51.

463 Ibid., 78.
and their openness to learning. As a result, care should be taken in the development of a variety of approaches to the program goals. Nevertheless, it remains true that students will learn “from their own experience at the edge of their own readiness to learn.”

Sixth and finally, taking a step back and seeing the broader picture can also regulate the heat. The broader picture is that God is always at work in worship practices and in formation for ministry leadership. Taylor, a frequent preacher and worship leader herself, writes, “After the [worship service] starts, the anxiety goes away. I remember that this is a worship service, not a solo performance, and that God promised to show up.” Ultimately there is comfort for worship leaders in knowing that they are participating in something bigger than themselves and their successes and failures. This larger purpose is the reason to be engaged in worship and pastoral leadership at all. The task is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). It is to participate in the building of God’s realm of Shalom, the mission that God has initiated and leads.

In addition to teaching more about the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of formation and the role of the presider (especially at the sacraments), various pedagogical strategies would better equip UCC Formation students to enter more fully and purposefully into the learning process, and strengthen their sense of identity and spirituality as presiders. Among these strategies are introducing to them the learning process diagram, as well as the concepts of provoking learning, facilitating safety, and regulating the heat.

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464 Ibid., 49.

I conclude this section by proposing one more area of additional teaching: introducing a new model for chapel worship, the playground.

### 9.4.5 Introducing the Metaphor of Chapel as Playground

The next consideration for applying the findings of this study to the future direction of the UCC Formation worship program is to introduce an additional metaphor for chapel worship — worship as *playground*. Guardini’s concept of worship as play was introduced in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The concept of chapel worship as playground was suggested by a graduate student at the Quebec City Societas Liturgica Conference. The focus group considered and expanded on this metaphor with promising results. Kay embraced the metaphor of play when she articulated her new understanding of liberty as the “freedom to range” rather than the “pressure to innovate.” This language of roaming is reminiscent of Guardini’s definition of worship as play in the sense that the liturgy creates a world of open fields and woods in which the soul can explore and develop.\(^{466}\) This understanding of liberty to range felt more freeing and less stressful to Kay than the experimental lab model and its accompanying expectation to innovate.

Other playful images for chapel experiences were evident in the research data. Instead of naming the challenge of ecumenical worship planning as a tension or conflict, Ivy described it as a dance. “I valued the gifts each denomination brought to the table,” she concluded.\(^ {467}\) She also wrote, “Chapel enabled me to test the ground with contemporary worship forms that maybe I could not do in most traditional churches. . . . I felt we had a chance to play a bit in chapel.”\(^ {468}\)

\(^{466}\) Guardini, 41. Deb also wrote that she was affirmed in her United Church identity by “roaming” through the traditions of other denominations. Deb Q7a.

\(^{467}\) Ivy Q7a.

\(^{468}\) Ivy Q7b.
Interestingly, Otis chose the playful image of the rollercoaster to depict the process of formation. While I do not develop the rollercoaster metaphor any further, it is noteworthy that the exhilarating, playful spirit of a rollercoaster is only possible because of the carefully engineered safety and structural parameters – that is, the order – intrinsic to the ride. Both playground and rollercoaster capture the spirit of the fear, risk, and pleasure – all within a bounded or ordered setting – that are a part of worship and the formation experiences that study participants shared.

Approaching chapel worship with a spirit of adventure and a willingness to experiment with new ways to tell the story, as Amy did, or with playfulness and curiosity, as Hal did, may be more freeing for students than the metaphor of learning lab or model church. The metaphor of liturgical playground could also help students to understand the nature and purpose of worship in the AST chapel.

A playground has boundaries and lots of space. Fun can be had with only a limited number of available items (such as balls, swings, and slides). In other words, there is freedom within a given structure (traditioned innovation). Play brings joy; it builds relationships; it has no purpose outside of itself but is always about something bigger than the play itself. It involves deep engagement of the whole being – hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. There is no one “right way” to play but it follows certain rules, or has certain limits that the players must accept, like the bounded playground itself. There is turn-taking, a back and forth rhythm to play. It involves a certain degree of risk, although actions are taken to lessen that risk. It navigates space and context. It involves repetition or conditioning, honing of skills, problem solving, and

469 Amy Q6 and Hal Q5a.


471 Ibid., 45.
challenge to improve. Play also results in a loss of self-consciousness: those who play “lose themselves” in the experiences and lose track of time. Yet they also find themselves in play. Play nourishes creativity.

The playground provides opportunities for children to learn to relate with groups, to grow in flexibility and confidence, to trust in themselves and others, to risk trying new and daring things, to tolerate tensions and negotiate conflicts, to play fair and take turns, and to play for sheer joy without keeping score.

The metaphor of liturgical playground recognizes the courage needed to take risks that study participants name as key to their learning. Chapel as playground values creativity and trying new things. We discover the shape of something by exploring the edges of it; thus chapel worship as play still values reaching further and experimentation, just as a research lab provides. But a playground is perhaps a more open and less intimidating space than a lab. This conforms with Koppel’s observation that “Play is partly about creating a safe, secure, trustworthy environment that gives people permission to experiment with new ideas and patterns of faithful living.”

Play doesn’t have to be perfect, and thus students have freedom to strive for excellence rather than perfection. Finn wrote, “[Formation worship] helped me to be more at peace with

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472 Ibid., 35.
474 Amy Q4, for example.
475 Finn Q5a and Bea I4f.
476 Koppel, 49.
477 Bea I4f.
making mistakes. That has ultimately filtered into worship that I lead anywhere.”

Chapel as playground encourages collaboration, as play is relational. Bea wrote that one of the skills she developed in chapel worship was how to collaborate with others in way that still allows for creativity.

Play also makes room for tackling difficult issues. The role of the jester is to challenge assumptions and turn things upside down, just like Jesus did when he placed a child in the disciples’ midst and declared: “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4).

Another advantage of the chapel as playground metaphor is the relationship with the congregants. No one stands outside, and everyone has a part in a game that has been played before. Each one takes turns in hosting the games for others. The metaphor provides an opportunity to discuss balancing order and liberty in worship and formation, by thinking together about “playing it safe” and “playing with fire” (terms that also evoke Merizow’s roles of facilitator and provocateur in transformative learning).

There are disadvantages to the metaphor of chapel worship as playground. It could be interpreted by participants as childish or immature, a luxury or a waste of time, silly or foolish. As a result, they might not take chapel worship seriously. Play may not be comfortable or natural for some, or feel awkward. Most students want to appear purposeful and competent. Some may need to learn to be playful. A problem with the lab metaphor could apply here as well: students may interpret from this metaphor that innovation is the preferential option, not

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478 Finn Q9b.

479 Bea Q7b.
realizing that play requires structure. Without rules, “it’s not cricket.” It would be important to be clear that to be childlike is not to be childish, and that play needs to be serious not silly, engaging not entertaining. However, this metaphor’s disadvantages also provide opportunity to discuss the shadow side of play and Formation, such as the competition the members of the focus group experienced during their time at AST.

Koppel argues for the adoption of play as an embodied theology to guide the practice of ministry. He defines play as “cooperative engagement within the self and between self and others that heightens enjoyment of God and pulls us more deeply into life experience. It incorporates the new and innovative within already structured patterns of behavior and allows for making mistakes as we develop creative, and sometimes previously unimagined, pastoral leadership practices.” Taking such an approach to chapel worship is very helpful, for it embraces cooperation, allows for making mistakes, engages with others and God, elevates worship as the enjoyment of God, values creativity, and looks toward incorporating the innovative within familiar patterns. Helpfully, play also lessens anxiety and guilt, and it revels in taking small steps. As liturgical theologian Don Saliers puts it, “This holy play requires discipline, and a long memory. This holy play asks of us vulnerability to grace and to one another. This holy play invites us to a profound trust that God has created us to delight in the gift of life.”

Play’s association with worship, as well as growth and learning, make the playground a strong metaphor for Formation worship. It brings worship, learning, and the work of the Holy

480 Johnston, 41.
481 Koppel, 14.
482 Ibid., 10-11.
483 Don E. Saliers cited in ibid., 37.
Spirit into one metaphor. Play is recreation/re-creation. In the process of formation for ministry, the Spirit re-creates. Therefore, introducing the metaphor of chapel worship as playground to the students in the UCC Formation Group, and observing any impact this interpretation may have on their learning, are the next applications of the findings of this study.

I also plan to experiment with incorporating a more playful stance to the program as a whole. I hope to introduce our plenary group time with 10-15 minutes of play to help build community and to help students overcome or at least manage any discomfort they may have. I intend to invite participation in a series of playful reflections on aspects of worship, formation for ministry, and the identity and spirituality of the presider, including more exploration of metaphor. I am inspired by Johnston’s remark that “If you ice a cake, light sparklers, and sing, something celebrative may happen.”

9.5 Areas for Further Research

This thesis rests on the proposition that viewing formation for UCC worship and ministry through the lens of “ordered liberty” is valuable to the research question. However, the study results reveal just how difficult it is to identify the employment of order and liberty and the interrelationship between the two in the context of weekly Sunday worship. For example, the most commonly used resource for worship planning among United Church ministers is Gathering. But is the use of Gathering, a collection of worship resources written by their peers, evidence of order, liberty, or a dynamic relationship between the two? Or is it not which resource is used but how it is used and for what purpose that determines the extent to which the dialectic of ordered liberty is operative in worship? Further inquiry is needed in this area.

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484 Johnston, 40.

485 Lukey, ed., Gathering.
Also worthy of further exploration is the need that Hal expressed for training on how to empower lay leaders to co-plan and lead worship. Witvliet likens teaching worship to training not only baseball players, but also baseball coaches, “player-coaches” for collaborative worship ministry.486 From Hal’s interview it is obvious that he believed that this was a significant gap in his preparation for ministry. Further research on training player-coaches is warranted.

9.6 Summary of Proposed Actions

The dynamic dialectics of order and liberty, continuity and discontinuity, tradition and transformation are helpful in describing formation for ministry. I have argued that formation for ministry is the shaping of the student’s knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality in a way that is unique to the individual but also representative of his or her denomination. Thus formation for worship leadership can be rightly described as the acquisition of knowledge; the honing of skills; the development of a pastoral identity; and the integration of all this within a spirituality of gratitude and appreciation.487

The case study method was chosen for this research project in part because it is an effective tool to evaluate a program. In light of all that has been learned from the study, I propose the following actions:

1) Keep the required individual written worship reflection. Although participants found it to be an interruption to their worship, they also found it helpful in a variety of ways. The assignment allows time for introverts to think, gives distance to process the experience, and makes sure reflection happens in a busy term. The assignment is currently focused on service content and the function of worship leadership. I will

486 Witvliet, 123.

487 See also ibid., 130.
expand the questions to invite reflection on identity and spirituality, in addition to knowledge and skills.

2) Continue to require students to work in groups to plan and lead worship, in order to practice collaborating with a wide range of people. I want them to understand worship as the work of the people, and to gain experience collaborating for their future ministry. Ministers don’t often choose their co-labourers on their pastoral charge and must work effectively with volunteers.

3) Add opportunities to pray extemporaneously in UCC Formation. The importance of this was mentioned by several students.

4) Consider the expansion of opportunities for students (especially extroverts) to share feedback verbally. Meg pointed out that the current system of evaluation focuses on the individual even though they have done the worship service as a team. I will also explore expanding the responsibilities of the worship team to include debriefing worship.

5) Include more discussions and instruction on presiding, and especially on the worship leader’s identity and relationship to the Holy Spirit while presiding at the sacraments. Study participants identified presiding at the sacraments as special moments in their ministries, but they found it difficult to articulate their understanding of their role as sacramental presiders.

6) Introduce the students to the diagram of the learning process and discuss ways that we might together effectively provoke learning, facilitate safety, and regulate the heat.
7) Introduce the metaphor of chapel worship as liturgical playground and take a more playful stance in Formation program offerings.

9.7 A Last Word

In this time of uncertainty, worship is under pressure to change in many UCC congregations. The denomination needs worship leaders who are imaginative, creative, and nimble in their worship planning, open to exploring new ways of worshipping, and able to “shift [worship practices] as the world around us shifts.” Worship leaders are needed who will “stand firm in claiming practices over time.” Leaders are needed who won’t thoughtlessly adopt the latest fad and won’t include a component in a service simply because they “like it.” Rather, this era calls for thoughtful, “ordered” crafting of transformational worship practices that connect people to God and to one another, and that connect the needs of the world with God’s desires for the world.

This thesis has allowed me as the UCC Formation Director to hear from former students about how they were shaped as UCC worship leaders through their experiences in the AST chapel. It is my hope that this project will contribute to the formation of future worship leaders so that the people of The United Church of Canada (and others) will, in their faith communities, their worship lives, and beyond, preserve (as the 1932 Book of Common Order puts it) the “light and power” and “devotion” of ages past while courageously following the unquenchable Spirit of Christ wherever she may lead.

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488 Hess, x.

489 Ibid., x.
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*Toronto School of Theology Doctor of Ministry Program Handbook.* Toronto, ON: Toronto School of Theology, April 2011.


_____. *Forms of Service for the Offices of the Church.* Toronto, ON: The United Church Publishing House, 1926.


Appendix A: Worship Feedback Form

Worship Feedback Form

Date of Service:
Worship Leaders:
Theme of Service:

The following chart lists many aspects of our worship life. The numbers indicate a continuum. Please circle the number that you feel best describes your experience of worship today. This exercise will help us identify both strengths and areas that need further consideration.

5=excellent  1=poor

1. Worship Leadership

Well-prepared
Could hear everything easily
Effective use of gestures/facial expressions/posture
Set a tone of warmth and welcome, expectation and anticipation
Natural tone of voice
Eye contact made with listeners
Relaxed pace
Effective use of space

Comments:

2. Worship Content

Worship flowed smoothly from one element to next
Moved through Gathering to Word to Response to Sending Forth
Service had a coherent, identifiable theme
Hymn lyrics and tunes complemented the worship theme
Variety of hymns/range of musical traditions
Reflection on Biblical text honest and expectant
Clarity of ideas/flow of thought
Engaging/compelling
Encountered God at a meaningful level
Heard “Good News” today
Inspired and sustained discipleship
Prayers spoke to God directly
Prayers reflected the real language and experience of worshippers

Comments:
3. How has this worship service blessed you today?

4. My suggestions for the worship leaders’ consideration:

(adapted from Betsy Hogan, “Passionate Worship” Workshop, Maritime Conference 2010)
Appendix B:
Letter of Endorsement from Dean Jody Clarke, Atlantic School of Theology

May 22, 2015

To whom it may concern:

Re. Sally Shaw

Sally Shaw, a student at Emmanuel College, Toronto, is employed as the United Church Formation Director at Atlantic School of Theology (AST). She is currently working on her Doctor of Ministry degree through the Toronto School of Theology. Sally is studying the impact of United Church students’ participation in AST chapel worship on their formation as congregational worship leaders.

By this letter, I wish to confirm that Sally Shaw has my support and permission to carry out this study. Her research project includes three methods of data gathering: questionnaire, interview and focus group—all intended to explore students’ experiences of chapel worship at AST and their meaning for their formation as worship leaders. I understand that no current students, only alumni, will be invited to participate in this study, which will be conducted once approval of the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board is obtained.

I believe that the work being done through this study will benefit the school, specifically the United Church Formation program at AST. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke
Dean

Excellence in Ecumenical Theological Education
Appendix C: Letter of Approval from the Ethics Review Board

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 32034

September 23, 2015

Dr. William Kervin
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Rev. Sally Shaw
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Dear Dr. Kervin and Rev. Sally Shaw,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "The dynamic of "Ordered Liberty": Forming worship leaders for the United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology chapel"

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: September 23, 2015 |
| Expiry Date: September 22, 2016 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Brower, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Jeffrey Steede, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager
September 8, 2016

Dr. William Kervin
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Rev. Sally Shaw
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Dear Dr. Kervin and Rev. Sally Shaw,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "The dynamic of "Ordered Liberty": Forming worship leaders for the United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology chapel"

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: September 23, 2015 |
| Expiry Date: September 22, 2017 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |
| Renewal: 1 of 4 |

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research protocol through the Research Ethics Board (REB) delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Research Oversight and Compliance - Human Research Ethics Program as soon as possible. If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Please ensure that you submit an Ethics Renewal Form or a Study Completion/Closure Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your protocol. Note that ethics renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.


Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Brower, Ph.D.
REB Chair
Appendix D: Letter of Invitation

October 2015

Dear ________,

I am writing to you today as a current Doctor of Ministry student at Toronto School of Theology. Since I began in the role of UCC Formation Director 7 years ago, I have been intrigued by the role of students’ experiences of attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship in the AST chapel in their development as worship leaders.

I am currently embarking on a qualitative research study that attempts to discover in what ways students’ experiences in AST chapel worship have contributed to their formation as worship leaders within the United Church of Canada. It is my hope that by learning about student experiences of attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on Chapel worship, and how they influence the development of our students as worship leaders in the United Church of Canada, that we will be able to utilize this information to improve the future design of the Formation program and the United Church worship experience at AST.

I would like to invite you to participate in this three-stage study. Your participation would involve one or two of the stages. The first activity is a written questionnaire, with an expected completion time of 15 minutes to 1 hour. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked if you would be willing to be interviewed. If you are interviewed, it is expected to be 1 hour in length, conducted either by phone, or in person if distance allows. During this interview, we will be inquiring about three areas of interest: 1) your key or pivotal experiences attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship in the AST chapel on Wednesday afternoons for UCC Formation, 2) a description of your current worship leadership values and practices, and 3) links between your post-AST worship leadership and your experiences in AST chapel. After the transcripts of the interview are prepared, you will be invited to review them and make additional written comments. The third stage of the study is a focus group of three participants in the Maritime region who will review the initial analysis of the data in light of their own experiences and make recommendations for future action.

As is the common practice for research studies of this nature, your participation in this study is voluntary. Your responses will remain confidential. A pseudonym will be chosen for you for reporting purposes. Please see the attached Consent Form for further details. Please feel free to share with me any questions or concerns that you might have about the study. Thank you for considering this invitation to participate. I look forward to your reply.

Blessings and peace,

Sally Shaw
Appendix E: Consent Form for Participants

Research Project Consent Form for Participants

Project Title: Forming Worship Leaders for the United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology Chapel

Investigator: Sally Shaw

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in my DMin research project, exploring the impact of attending, planning, leading and reflecting on experiences of worship in the AST chapel on the formation of students as United Church Worship leaders. I am conducting this study as a part of my Doctor of Ministry program at Toronto School of Theology. It is also my hope that this study will contribute to the strengthening of the United Church Formation Program at AST. Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke, Dean of AST, has stated his support for this research project.

Research Procedures

This study consists of three stages:

1) You are invited to complete a written questionnaire, with an expected completion time of 15 minutes to 1 hour. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked if you would be willing to be interviewed.

2) You may be asked to participate in an interview, expected to be 1 hour in length, conducted either in person or by phone, at a time and location convenient for you. During this interview, we will be inquiring about three areas of interest: 1) your key or pivotal experiences attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation worship in the AST chapel, 2) a description of your current worship leadership values and practices, and 3) links between your post-AST worship leadership and your experiences in AST chapel. After the transcripts of the interview are prepared, you will be invited to review them and make additional written comments.

3) You may be asked to participate in a focus group of three participants in the Maritime region who will review the initial analysis of the data in light of their own experiences and make recommendations for future action.

The research will be conducted over several weeks in the fall of 2015. It will be the cornerstone of my DMin thesis and will be incorporated into future planning of the AST UCC Formation program and written materials. I plan to share what I learn from the study with the AST community. A summary of the thesis paper may be printed and made available to its members. There is also a possibility that I will refer to the study results in future published writing/presentations. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms and alter identifying details to further protect your anonymity.
Benefits

Possible benefits of participating in this project include: insightful reflection and conversation on the meaning and purpose of worship, the role and identity of the presider, the values you carry into your ministries of Word and Sacrament, and some of the key learnings you discovered in your time at AST. Your participation in this project also affords you an opportunity to contribute to the future UCC Formation program at AST.

Risks

There are no known risks associated with this research project. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may choose to not answer particular questions or participate in discussions. Similarly, if you experience any distress in the course of the study, please inform me promptly and assistance and support will be arranged. As outlined below, the researcher will take steps to protect anonymity and personal identifying information and secure research data. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at sally.shaw@mail.utoronto.ca or 902-832-9859.

You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study.

1. I, ______________________, am willing to take part in a study conducted by Sally Shaw, Doctor of Ministry candidate at the Toronto School of Theology. I understand this study is examining the experience of United Church students’ involvement in AST chapel worship. The purpose of this study is to learn about the process of formation for worship leadership and how the United Church Formation Program can facilitate this process more effectively.

2. I am willing to complete the questionnaire and return my responses to Sally within 3 weeks of receiving the questionnaire. The questionnaire will focus on my unique experience, thoughts and feelings regarding my participation in UCC Formation worship in the AST chapel.

3. I agree that the researcher can contact me to clarify my responses on my questionnaire or invite me to participate in a one-hour interview or focus group.

4. If interviewed, I understand that a transcript of my interview will be sent to me for my review and added observations.

5. If interviewed, the interview will be tape recorded for transcription with my permission. Only the interviewer will have access to the recording.

6. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time. I understand that I am free not to answer any specific question, not to discuss anything that I do not wish to disclose, and to terminate an interview at any time.
7. I understand that the data will be coded and analyzed by Sally Shaw. All the data will be discussed anonymously with the focus group. Should I be directly quoted in the written thesis or an article, a pseudonym will be used and any specific identifying data will be altered to protect my identity. Moreover, any persons I mention during the interview will be provided with pseudonyms should they be mentioned in the focus group, thesis or future article.

8. All recordings and written material will be kept private and secured in a locked fire-safe during the study and destroyed upon the conferring of the degree. All electronic data will be stored on an encrypted data stick.

9. I know that no remuneration will be offered to me for my participation in this study. I understand that a written summary of the research findings will be made available to me, when they are complete, upon my request.

I have read this statement and I voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________ Date:____________

Please return this consent form in full. You will receive a copy for your records.
Appendix F: Questionnaire

Research Project: Forming Worship Leaders for the United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology Chapel

Investigator: Sally Shaw

Questionnaire

Thank you for completing this questionnaire! As outlined in the consent form, your participation is voluntary and you may answer as many or as few questions as you wish. I look forward to receiving any and all feedback that you feel comfortable providing. No personal information will be shared in the reporting of the data. The demographic information requested on this form is solely for the purpose of creating a balanced research group. Please keep in mind that I am particularly interested in your experiences of attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on Wednesday afternoon United Church Formation worship at Atlantic School of Theology.

Name: Year of Graduation from AST:

1) How would you express the meaning and purpose of worship?

2) Faithful United Church worship is...

3) What is the purpose of the presider as worship planner and leader?

4) How would you describe yourself as worship planner and leader today?

5a) What do you value in a worship presider?
5b) Where do these values come from?

6) How did your experiences attending, planning, leading and reflecting on Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation worship inform your current worship leadership?

7a) During your experiences in chapel worship at AST, what new knowledge or insights did you gain?
7b) What skills did you develop?
7c) How was your identity and spirituality as a worship leader shaped?

8) To what or whom do you credit this?

9) Some scholars assert that theological school chapel is like a research laboratory, where experiments take place and people learn from their successes and failures; some scholars claim that theological school chapel is a group spiritual practice that should never be evaluated, simply experienced; some scholars maintain that theological school chapel is an opportunity to model excellent congregational worship, in other words, best practices. Other scholars promote other images or metaphors.
9a) What do you think theological school chapel is like?
9b) How did this image or images influence your experience of chapel worship?

10) Please list the sources you have used in the past four weeks to plan and lead worship (excluding sermon preparation.)
10a) What percentage would be material original to you?
10b) What percentage would be from non-United Church of Canada sources?
10c) What percentage would be from United Church of Canada sources?

11) Additional comments that you would like to share. . .

12) Would you be willing to be interviewed (by phone or in person) to further explore the topic of your formation as a United Church worship leader through your experiences of Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation worship?

Year of ordination:

Number of years of participation in Wed afternoon United Church Formation Group:

Location of current worship leadership:

Thank you again for completing this questionnaire. Please email your responses to sally.shaw@mail.utoronto.ca by December 28, 2015.
Appendix G: Interview Guide and Transcript Review

Brief check-in.

ReIntroduction of purpose of research project. Most interested in Wed afternoon worship. For the purpose of this interview, I’ll be using the terms “worship leader” and “presider” interchangeably. The intent of the project is the advancement of the program, so please feel free to speak candidly.

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. I would like to record it. Do I have your consent? I will also be making notes of our conversation. Do you have any questions about the recording and note-taking? Remember, you do not have to answer any question you don’t want to and can terminate the interview at any point. Just let me know that you would like to pass or stop. Your name will be kept confidential. You’ll be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of reporting the results of the survey and any identifying information will be removed. Are you comfortable? Ready to start? Let’s begin.”

1) What 2 or 3 words would you use to describe your overall experience at AST?

2) Narrowing our focus to Chapel worship, which two or three words would characterize your experience in AST chapel worship (can be attending, planning or leading)?

3) What did planning and leading worship mean for you when you were a student?

4) Tell me a story or two of your experiences in chapel worship, especially those you recall as being particularly important or developmental for you as a worship leader (something that stuck with you, that you have carried with you.)

[Check to ensure the following was addressed: What was done (act)? When or where was it done (scene)? Who did it (agent)? How did he or she do it (agency)? What was the response, emotional and other (reaction)? Why was it done (purpose)? What was the result/behaviour change?]

Now, let’s look more closely at this story to determine how specific factors might have impacted your experience.

a) Firstly, please describe your reflection process. What did it look like for you as you processed your experience and what you learned from it?

b) What did you bring personally to the situation that influenced your experience? (What do you think there was about yourself that impacted your experience? Could be personality or attitudes or expectations or prior experiences or hopes....)

c) What spiritual or theological factors influenced your experience and learning?

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490 Sensing, 165.
d) How did the learning environment contribute? (could be physical space, program structure, ethos...)

e) How did your classmates, faculty, or others influence your learning experience?

f) Did you encounter any spoken or unspoken values about United church worship, Wed afternoon worship or AST chapel worship?

g) Last question for this story: Where was God in this experience?

5a) What were your expectations of chapel worship when you arrived at AST?

5b) How were they met or not?

6) More generally, how might your chapel experiences have influenced your current worship leadership?

We are now going to approach this same questions from 4 different perspectives: knowledge, skills, identity and spirituality. The first is knowledge.

a) What new knowledge or thinking about worship leadership did you acquire as a result of your participation in chapel worship?

b) What skills did you develop?

c) How was your identity as a worship leader shaped? (Identity = how you see or understand yourself as a worship presider, who you are as a presider)

d) How might God have worked on and through you during chapel worship? In other words, how was your spirituality shaped?

7) Did you complete worship reflection exercises, that self-evaluation exercise that incorporated feedback forms from student peers and a professor? If so, what role did they play?

8) What was missing from your experiences that would have been helpful for you?

9) New direction: Describe the joys and challenges of presiding at worship.

10) Good presiding tries to accomplish. . .

11a) When you preside in worship, what sorts of things do you think you do well

11b) What do you think is important about doing it well?

12) Are there any metaphors/images/examples you use to describe your role as presider?
13) How does the presider’s work connect to work of the Holy Spirit?

14) What do you hear from other folks about your presiding?

15) (Besides chapel worship) What other influences have helped you develop into the worship leader you are now?  

16) To summarize, students attend up to 72 United Church worship services over the course of a 3 year MDiv. What impact would you say those services have had on you?

17) What three hopes or wishes do you have for Formation worship?

18) Is there anything that you would like to add? What should I have asked that I did not think to ask?

Thank you. Next Steps.

**In a couple of weeks, Transcript Review:**

1) Is there anything you would like to clarify or add to your responses?

2) What did your involvement in the research tell you about yourself? Your formation?

Once I receive your transcript review, your participation in this project will be complete. Thank you!

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491 This question has been adapted from a question used in the following study: Susan Komives, Julie Owen, Susan Longerbeam, and Felicia Mainella, “Developing a Leadership Identity: A Grounded Theory,” *Journal of College Student Development* 46, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 595.

492 Sensing, 173.
Appendix H: Focus Group Note-taker Consent and Confidentiality Agreement

Project Title: Forming Worship Leaders for the United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology Chapel

Investigator: Sally Shaw

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in my DMin research project, exploring the impact of attending, planning, leading and reflecting on experiences of worship in the AST chapel on the formation of United Church students as worship leaders. I am conducting this study as a part of my Doctor of Ministry program at Toronto School of Theology. It is also my hope that this study will contribute to the strengthening of the United Church Formation Program at AST. Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke, Dean of AST, has stated his support for this research project.

Research Procedures

This study consists of three components:

1) A written questionnaire to be completed by AST UCC alumni.
2) Interviews with four to six AST UCC alumni.
3) A focus group, consisting of three Maritime region UCC alumni, Sally Shaw as researcher and focus group facilitator, and an outside expert who will take notes, review the conversation, and offer feedback according to a series of predetermined categories. The group will review the initial analysis of the data in light of their own experiences and make recommendations for future action. You have been invited to act as the outside expert and note-taker.

The research will be conducted over several weeks in the fall of 2015. It will be the cornerstone of my DMin thesis and incorporated into future planning of the AST UCC Formation program and written materials. I plan to share what I learn from the study with the AST community. Portions of the thesis paper may be printed and made available to its members. There is also a possibility that I will refer to the study results in published writing in the future. In this event, I will use pseudonyms and alter identifying details to protect your anonymity, if you so wish.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participating in this project include: meaningful conversation and reflection on the meaning and purpose of worship, the role and identity of the presider, the values you carry into your ministries of Word and Sacrament, and some of the key learnings you have discovered in your time at AST. Your participation in this project also affords you an opportunity to contribute to the future UCC Formation program at AST and perhaps glean information or insights that may be helpful to your ministry.
Risks
As you are not a participant in the study, but an outside expert, there are no known risks associated with this research project. However, if you feel distress in the course of the study, please inform me promptly and assistance will be arranged. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at sally.shaw@mail.utoronto.ca or 902-832-9859.

1. I, ______________________, am willing to take part in a study conducted by Sally Shaw, Doctor of Ministry candidate at the Toronto School of Theology. I understand this study is examining the experience of United Church students’ involvement in AST chapel worship. The purpose of this study is to learn about the process of formation for worship leadership and how the United Church Formation Program can facilitate this process more effectively.

2. I understand that it is my responsibility is to take notes during the focus group and to give them to Sally Shaw at the end of the day.

3. I understand that I cannot make any copies of the notes for any reason.

4. I understand that I must never disclose any of the information shared in the group with anyone else.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time. I understand that I am free not to answer any specific question, not to discuss anything that I do not wish to disclose, and to terminate my participation at any time.

6. I understand that the data will be coded and analyzed by Sally Shaw. Should I be directly quoted in the written thesis or an article, a pseudonym will be used and any specific identifying data will be altered to protect my identity, if I so wish. Moreover, any persons I mention during the interview will be provided with pseudonyms should they be mentioned in the thesis or a future article.

7. All recordings and written material will be kept private and secured in a locked safe during the study and destroyed upon the conferring of the degree. All electronic data will be stored on an encrypted data stick.

8. I know that no remuneration will be offered to me for my participation in this study. I understand that a written summary of the research findings will be made available to me, when they are complete, upon my request.

I have read this statement and I voluntarily consent to participate in the focus group as outside expert and note-taker.

Participant’s Signature: _______________________________ Date:__________

Please return this consent form in full. You will receive a copy for your records.
Appendix I: Focus Group Agenda

9 am  Welcome and thank you
Review of purpose of time together: especially interested in Wed afternoon worship
Introductions: Outside Expert (OE) as note-taker, myself as facilitator
Do we have your permission to take notes?

Prayer
Review of ground rules: Confidentiality, speak one at a time, treat one another with respect, permission to disagree with the group, please feel free to speak candidly, you will be given a pseudonym when reporting the results and any identifying information will be removed
Review of agenda- noting break times (already on flip chart)

9:10  2 or 3 words to describe your experience at AST. 2 or 3 words to describe your experience of chapel worship. Share the interviewee’s responses.
Presentation of questionnaire and interview results:
“What do you think? What surprised you by its a) presence, b) absence?” (Write questions on board.)
Topic: Meaning and Purpose of Worship
Topic: UCC Worship
Topic: Metaphors for Presiding
Topic: Presider as Worship Planner and Leader
Topic: What do you Value in a Worship Presider?

9:50  How does the process of formation of UCC students as worship leaders unfold through their chapel worship experiences? What actions/strategies influence this unfolding? (Stories from Formation)

10:40  Break

10:55  What have we learned from this case? What wisdom do we garner? (refer to lists of what people learned: knowledge, skills, identity and spirituality)
Three wishes for current AST students.
What concrete lessons could we apply to future practice? What recommendations might we make?
Share recommendations from others after initial sharing takes place.

11:45  Break for worship and lunch

1:30 pm  Reconvene: Responses to recommendations
Why do we worship at Theological School?

1:40 pm  (Sally now note-taker)
OE reports her responses to the following questions, engages participants in discussion as she goes along:
What do you think? What surprised you? What is missing or overlooked?
Where is clarification needed?
Where does the data converge and diverge from the previous data gathering?
What assumptions are we making in our conversation?
What needs further research?
(OE resumes note-taking)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:20</td>
<td>Ideas for metaphors for process of Formation: How would you depict/illustrate this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40</td>
<td>What did your involvement in the research tell you about yourself? Your formation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:50</td>
<td>Thank Yous!!!! and next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Departure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Thesis Proposal

The Dynamic of “Ordered Liberty”: Forming Worship Leaders for The United Church of Canada within the Atlantic School of Theology Chapel

A DMin Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the DMin Program Committee
Toronto School of Theology

August 5, 2015

By
Sally Shaw
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I. Background and Context of this Applied Research Thesis

Current Ministry Context

In 2008, I took on the position of United Church Formation Director at Atlantic School of Theology (AST), an ecumenical seminary in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that trains Anglican and United Church of Canada (UCC) students for ordained and lay ministry, and Roman Catholic lay people for congregational leadership. Numbers range from 14 to 28 residential UCC MDiv students in any given year.\textsuperscript{493} The majority of these students are candidates for ordination, a few are in discernment or considering entering into the discernment process. The female to male ratio is typically three to one. Most of the UCC students are Anglo-Celtic (a small number are of African-Canadian descent), with middle-class or working-class backgrounds, from across Canada (usually Alberta, Ontario, the three Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.) Characteristically we have one or two White or Black Bermudians in the group, as the Bermuda Synod of the Methodist Church is a part of the UCC’s Maritime Conference. About a third of the group are in their 20’s. The rest of the students’ ages range from the 30’s to mid 50’s. Most of these students are cradle United Church, a few grew up in other denominations, one or two discovered church as an adult.\textsuperscript{494}

In the past seven years, I have attended many worship services, both ecumenical midday prayer services and weekly worship services of the UCC community in the AST chapel. I have heard brilliant sermons by both students and faculty. In contrast, one sermon was entirely plagiarized. I have at times felt inspired and uplifted by our worship. At other times I have left

\textsuperscript{493} Although AST offers both a residential and a Summer Distance MDiv, for the purposes of this research study, I will be focusing exclusively on the residential MDiv students who are a part of the Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation program.

\textsuperscript{494} In the interest of disclosing the social context from which I write, I offer the following: I am female; I grew up in the UCC; my family of origin is middle class, and of Anglo-Celtic descent; I began my theological studies at Emmanuel College in my 20’s, and was ordained by the UCC in 1992. My own formation as worship leader is outlined later in this paper.
disappointed, even offended once or twice. Each year, when submitting their program
evaluations, many UCC students will report that they find the worship meaningful and
important to their spiritual life. Others do not “feel the spirit.” Some students welcome the
responsibility of planning and leading worship as an opportunity to serve their community or to
hone their craft. Others consider it a burden and a source of anxiety.

Students demonstrate strong emotions on occasion, before and after leading worship.
One day a student came to speak with me, visibly upset. She shared with me that she had
experienced me as unsupportive of her when she co-led worship earlier in the day. Although I
was sitting in the front row, I chose to go forward to participate in a ritual action after everyone
else had gone. For me, going last was a sign of servanthood, similar to the presider receiving the
communion elements after everyone else has partaken, but the student interpreted my delay and
my body language as disapproval of the activity that they had planned. She revealed to me that
during the whole ritual she thought to herself, “Oh my God, what will I do if Sally doesn’t come
forward!!?!” She then said, “You have no idea how much power you have.” We talked that day
for quite some time, but she seemed no less upset when she left as when she arrived. I left
feeling very confused.

At its founding in 1971, AST was designed to be a fully ecumenical learning
community. To allow for denomination-specific programming, Wednesday afternoons were set
aside for the founding denominations to meet on their own. Roman Catholic and Anglican
Formation Directors were appointed by their respective denominational bodies at that time. Files
show that the UCC Formation program was originally overseen by a committee composed of
students, faculty and local clergy. The role of Formation Director was introduced to the UCC
community in the mid-1980’s in response to a student-led initiative to that end. Currently, it is
the practice of UCC students and faculty to meet on Wednesday afternoons for a half-hour worship service, which is student-planned and led. Every student is required to plan and lead worship two or three times a year in teams of two or three. After worship the students explore topics of interest specific to the UCC, and monthly, they meet in small groups for spiritual nurture and mutual support.

My role as United Church Formation Director is to design and facilitate the activities of the Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation Group, and to liaise with the wider church judicatories with regard to the students’ preparation for ministry. Although I am ordained, I am not currently ministering with a congregation: neither am I a member of the AST faculty. As the UCC Formation Director, I straddle the margins of church and academy, a “dual citizen,” with one foot planted in each “world.” In terms of our weekly UCC worship, I am essentially the “Dean” of the UCC Chapel. It is my responsibility to provide the framework within which the UCC students attend, plan, and lead worship, and to give shape to the community ethos in which our students learn.

In my time at AST, I have noticed that there are differing, sometimes conflicting, expectations of chapel worship among the faculty and students. Some expect chapel worship to be like a research lab, where creativity and experimentation are encouraged with the assumption that students will learn from their successes and failures. Others expect it to be a model of ideal worship, where we showcase our best practices. Others view it as primarily a devotional practice, an offering that is to be humbly given and gratefully received without critique. And then there is the occasional student who dashes off a service, giving the impression that they view worship as nothing more than another assignment that must be completed in the little extra time they have available. Faculty who work with the ecumenical student teams to plan and lead

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495 This expectation is often brought by visitors to chapel.
worship seem to take one of two approaches. Some work with their students, carefully crafting the worship experiences for the week. Others seem to give their students free rein, releasing them to experiment.

My observations of chapel worship at AST are consistent with those recorded in a collection of essays by professors of worship and Deans of chapels in US seminaries.496 Exploring a wide range of metaphors, including chapel as laboratory, monastery, song circle, classroom, church, and political territory, the contributors to this collection report the conflicting expectations for seminary chapel worship I have experienced at AST. For example, Evans advocates participation in worship without critique. He writes:

[W]orship in seminary chapels is usually considered extra-, co-, or para-curricular. There are good reasons for this - student preachers offering homiletic reflections shouldn’t fear the red pens of homiletics professors jotting down flaws on the service leaflet any more than those professors should feel the need to critique instead of simply responding to the Word proclaimed.497

In contrast, Mark Stamm advocates the position that, as institutions of higher learning, theological schools ought to not only transfer knowledge but to create new knowledge, and pioneer new ideas, like one would in a research lab.498 Stamm is of the opinion that when mistakes are lifted up and engaged, rather than ignored or glossed over, transformative learning can take place.499

496 See Siobhan Garrigan and Todd E. Johnson, eds., Common Worship in Theological Education (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). Please note that throughout this paper I will use the terms “seminary” and “theological school” interchangeably as AST’s primary purpose is preparing people for congregational ministry, and most often, ordained ministry.
**Personal Background**

When I reflect on my own formation as worship leader, I recall the importance of the worship life of my childhood congregation and my Presbytery summer church camp. These would be my “liturgies of origin.” The first was quite ordered, the second quite free in its expression. Both were filled with scripture, prayer, and music and attempted to connect with worshippers in meaningful ways. The services in my childhood church were filled with lots of words in the form of long prayers and sermons. Camp services were filled with visual expressions and actions; for example, walking along luminary-lined pathways to vespers services conducted around a bonfire on the beach and bible stories dramatized by campers. Foster *et al.*, writers of *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, remind us that students come to theological school already formed by their families, culture, experiences, and personal development.

My formation as worship leader continued at Emmanuel College in Toronto in 1989. At that time, student attendance at and leadership of daily worship services was encouraged but voluntary. Experimentation was welcomed but no evaluation took place. My worship leadership was formed by the teaching of David Newman and William Kervin, who were influenced by the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement; by participation in the chapel life of the College (I still say the ecumenical version of the Lord’s Prayer that I learned at Emmanuel); and by some excellent UCC worship resources. Working with acting and speech coaches was also formative. Important learning took place through worship leadership in classroom and chapel settings and in congregations on my two summer internship sites. My learning was enhanced by

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conversations about those experiences with congregation members, internship supervisors, trusted faculty, and teaching assistants.

I think that I was well formed for worship leadership in the UCC when I was ordained in 1992 and have felt confident in my role as worship leader throughout my ministry. I have served churches in both rural and urban settings, as solo minister, and in team ministry, in Saskatchewan, Southern Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Teaching has been a key component of my congregational ministry and I have taught Youth Ministry courses at Emmanuel College and St. Stephen’s College as Adjunct Faculty. It was my congregational experience and passion for education that brought me to AST as the UCC Formation Director.

I have felt less confident in my role as Formation Director, a role that was not modeled for me as Emmanuel College did not have a Formation Director during my time of study. The Toronto School of Theology Doctor of Ministry Program, with its emphasis on “advancing personal, professional, and theological integration in order to help the participants achieve a high level of competency in the practice of ministry and its theological underpinnings,”\textsuperscript{502} has become my Formation program for my ministry as UCC Formation Director. My DMin studies provide rich opportunities to learn and reflect, so that I might more fully integrate knowledge with experience to strengthen my ministry at AST.

\textit{Broader Contexts of Denomination and Canadian Society}

In addition to the setting of the AST chapel, the United Church worship tradition also impacts the context of this study. The term that best describes the tradition of UCC worship comes from the 1932 \textit{Book of Common Order}: “ordered liberty.” As noted in the book’s preface:

\textsuperscript{502} \textit{Toronto School of Theology Doctor of Ministry Program Handbook} (April 2011): 7.
In the churches which united to form The United Church of Canada there was an *ordered liberty* of common worship. They followed lines marked out by the Apostolic practice and hallowed by the general usage of Christendom, but they shrank from a uniformity that might quench the Spirit of God in the soul of [humanity]. In our worship we are rightly concerned for two things: first, that a worshipping congregation of the Lord’s people shall be free to follow the leading of the Spirit of Christ in their midst; and secondly, that the experience of many ages of devotion shall not be lost, but preserved—experience that has caused certain forms of prayers to glow with light and power.  

This passage highlights a lasting interest of our denomination to maintain both the forms of the past and the freedom to innovate. Since its formation in 1925, the UCC has had four volumes of orders for worship for “voluntary use” only.  

Each succeeding volume has grown in size. The most recent is the 776-page *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada*. Published in 2000, it is the United Church’s first postmodern liturgical resource, “an attempt at ordered liberty for the turn of the millennium.”

Kervin claims that we are “in an age where liturgical traditions are under significant pressure to respond to changing contexts.” Worshipping in a variety of local churches, I have witnessed several ways that our post-Christendom, postmodern culture has influenced faith communities and the individuals who join together to worship in our congregations and in our AST chapel.

Postmodernism’s rejection of universal truths has resulted in the acceptance of multiple realities and plural perspectives. This parallels increasing diversity in United Church worship,

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508 The hallmarks of postmodernism listed in the following paragraphs are summarized in Friedrich L Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 14-15.
The values of pluralism and inclusivity have encouraged the addition of worship practices and music from around the globe and, in some cases, from other faith traditions. For example, a local UCC congregation concludes its Sunday worship service with the Hindi greeting, “Namaste.” Weakening denominational loyalty can reduce the motivation of ministers and congregants to create a recognizable “United Church” worship service. Technological advances such as copiers and projectors have contributed to more diversity in worship. Digital technology creates even more significant challenges, “undoing boundaries, altering our sense of time and place.” Phyllis Airhart claims that “gathering in a building for worship at the same hour may someday seem as quaint to future generations as the notion of ‘Christendom’ now seems to us.”

The individualism and consumerism prevalent in contemporary Canadian culture also put pressure on United Church worship practice. Increasingly people are considered not citizens, but consumers, consumers that demand customization of the products they purchase. Anderson writes that some students expect that worship will express “my” faith and that worship is measured by what I “get” out of the service.

These contemporary cultural influences so pressure current worship practices that scholars and ministers alike are forced to explore anew questions about the meaning and purpose of worship, and the values for worship the UCC has upheld over the decades. Differing expectations of AST chapel worship practices, my role and experience as worship leader and Formation Director, UCC worship traditions and values, and contemporary Canadian culture,

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510 Phyllis Airhart, "Do we still believe that something vital is in the making?: The United Church of Canada at 90," The United Church Observer (June 2015): 31.
511 Ibid., 31.
provide the contextual framework for this study, as they are four key factors of many that shape the context within which AST students and faculty live, study, worship, and learn, and hence students’ formation as worship leaders.

II. Statement of the Research Problem

For the seven years that I have served as UCC Formation Director, I have approached my work with the belief that worship is pivotal to the life of the United Church community at AST and to the mission of our theological school. Evans makes the claim that worship is vital to the proper functioning of the theological school, because of “its role in both building community and in consolidating all the various aspects of the curriculum.” 513

The Nairobi Statement of the Lutheran World Federation (1996) asserts that worship is the “heart and pulse of the church.” 514 Liturgy is our primary theology, using words and signs to speak of and to God. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: “the rule for praying is the rule for believing.” 515 Therefore, what we say and do in worship matters, and how we preside over what we say and do in worship also matters. The worship leader creates bridges so that the community can do more than talk *about* God: it can encounter the Holy, hear God’s call, respond with thanks and praise, commune with the Divine, follow in God’s way, and co-create God’s vision of Shalom.

I confess that I feel ambivalent about the role of worship in the life of the UCC Formation community. Part of me wants simply to accept each service as an offering without evaluation of any kind, trusting in the Holy Spirit to encourage the spiritual life of our community and its members through our communal worship. But I also do not want the students to miss a valuable opportunity to reflect on their experiences and integrate their learning in their

513 Evans, 63.
515 Ibid., 102. While the precise meaning of this Latin motto is subject to ongoing debate, it endures as a pivotal concept within liturgical theology.
preparation for ministry. Mary Hess argues that the seminary chapel is the most “explicitly embodied and potentially integrative space of theological education” and its “most under-theorized and under-explored resource.”\textsuperscript{516} This ambivalence is one of the reasons that I require students to evaluate just one worship service per year and a key motivation for me to undertake this study.

Over the years, I have learned that regardless of whether or not we intentionally reflect on our worship practices, our students are somehow shaped by them. For example, when asked why a student did something in worship on her internship site, her reply was, “That’s how we do it at school.” Garrigan reports that for large numbers of alumni, chapel was a “privileged place as a pedagogical site” for their formation for ministry leadership.\textsuperscript{517}

To date, I have taken two different approaches to help students learn from their experiences in planning and leading worship. My first approach was to set aside time during the mid-afternoon break for the worship leaders to invite other students into a private space to give them verbal feedback about that day’s worship service. My second approach is a more formal feedback process that includes receiving written feedback from two students, one faculty member, and from me that the student then incorporates into their self-evaluation. Each student is responsible for completing this evaluation process for one worship service each year. Both of these approaches have their advantages and their disadvantages and have been met with varied success. But I am still left with the question of how I might be most helpful in encouraging students to mine the treasure trove of chapel worship experience in their formation as worship leaders.

\textsuperscript{516} Hess, ix.
There are some studies on the development of leadership identity among college students and young military officers, but little written on the process of formation of students as worship leaders in the context of the theological school chapel, and none found to date that addresses the Canadian or the UCC context. Therefore, research is needed to understand the lived experiences of theological students as they attend, plan, lead, and reflect on worship in the theological school chapel; how these experiences shape or form them as worship leaders; what issues impact their formation; what strategies are employed by the participants in the process and to what effect; and what might be learned from this inquiry to foster the formation of theological students as worship leaders. To begin this research, I offer the following question.

**Research Question: In what ways have students’ experiences in AST chapel worship contributed to their formation as worship leaders within The United Church of Canada?**

My motivations for undertaking this learning come from the perspectives of the two worlds I inhabit: the church and the seminary. Karl Barth once said, “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” I would assert that worship is the “living centre” around which a UCC congregation orbits. Worship is also under pressure to change in many UCC congregations. We need worship leaders who are imaginative, creative, and nimble in their worship planning, open to exploring new

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520 Peter Brunner, "Divine Service in the Church," *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, 204.
ways of worshipping, and able to “shift [worship practices] as the world around us shifts.”

We also need worship leaders who won’t thoughtlessly adopt the latest fad and who won’t include a component in a service simply because they “like it,” but will thoughtfully create transformational worship practices that will connect people to God and to one another, and connect the needs of the world with God’s desires for the world.

AST is entrusted with helping to shape our students as capable worship leaders for the present and future church. Over the course of their MDiv studies, students are trained both in the classroom and in congregational settings. In addition to daily ecumenical prayer services, UCC students will attend up to seventy-two UCC worship services as a central component of their Wednesday Formation program, and will have planned and led between nine and twelve of those services. A significant amount of time and effort is dedicated to planning and leading worship. Yet little attention has been paid to chapel worship, especially as a pedagogical site. Accordingly, it is my hope that this study will help theological educators improve practices of formation for worship leadership so that the present and future church may be blessed with exemplary worship leaders. The analysis of how students are formed by seminary worship, a significant focus of this study, is the first step in working toward this goal.

III. Theory at Work in the Study

The dynamic of “ordered liberty” is key to understanding both UCC worship and formation for ministry, and as such is the organizing principle of this study. Kervin asserts that the dynamic of order and liberty is present throughout all the generations of United Church worship resources: “In every generation, order and liberty, catholicity and particularity, continue to inform and shape each other in ongoing interaction in the creation of something new, yet

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521 Hess, x.
something still connected to the familiar.”  

For Kervin, good United Church worship holds in dialectical relationships the following: order and liberty, form and freedom, catholicity and particularity, ecumenism and denominationalism, scholarship and reception, expert advice and popular opinion, continuity and change, tradition and innovation. Additional factors to be kept in dialogue include: heart and head, intellect and emotion, traditional and contemporary, formal and informal, high and low. “When the interplay is lost,” writes Kervin, “the dynamic dialectic that is at the heart of United Church worship is threatened and the result lacks liturgical integrity.”

The dynamic dialectic of “ordered liberty” is also an effective descriptor of formation. Brueggemann asserts that “[e]very community that wants to last beyond a single generation must concern itself with education.” The church educates so that the community will be rooted in and faithful to its past (continuity of vision, values, self-identity) and open to the present and future as God calls us forth into new life (discontinuity, change, and new ways of thinking). For Brueggemann, “education must attend both to processes of continuity and discontinuity in order to avoid fossilizing into irrelevance on the one hand, and relativizing into disappearance on the other hand.” The authors of Educating Clergy describe formation as the embodying of the tradition and equipping for the transformation of the tradition. “Seminary educators seek to form dispositions and the intuitive knowledge, or habitus, of a given religious or intellectual tradition in students. They intend for students to embody and equip the

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522 Kervin, "Dialectic," 332.
523 Ibid., 333.
526 Brueggemann, 1.
transformation of these traditions, as inherited ‘rules’ are changed into ‘strategies’ of new engagement to address new situations and circumstances.”

The dynamic dialectics of order and liberty, continuity and discontinuity, tradition and transformation are helpful in describing formation for ministry. For the purposes of this thesis proposal I offer the following definition of “formation:” the shaping of the student’s knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality within her or his mind, body, heart, and soul, in a way that is unique to the individual but also representative of his or her denomination. In terms of formation for worship leadership, students need to acquire knowledge (e.g. the liturgical calendar and patterns of worship); skills (e.g. choosing music or writing prayers); develop a pastoral identity that exhibits virtues such as humility and gracious hospitality; and learn how all these are enacted or performed within a spirituality of gratitude and appreciation for all the ways that God blesses and is blessed by the faith community through acts of worship.

In addition to the dynamic principle of ordered liberty, the following methodological considerations will be engaged in this research project: the theory of Jack Mezirow on transformative learning; Ruth Duck’s five theological categories for understanding worship; Kimberley Bracken Long’s contributions on presiding; and Eugene Rogers’ theology of the Holy Spirit.

O’Sullivan notes that “[t]ransformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and actions. It is a shift in consciousness that

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527 Foster et al., 23.
528 In employing this term, I don’t mean to imply that our students are passive lumps of clay that need to be shaped by more (in)formed others, for example, by seminary faculty and staff. Neither do I mean to imply that there is one ideal form into which each student is then pressed. Ibid., 126.
dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world." Mezirow proposes that the catalyst for transformative learning is a "disorienting dilemma" that disrupts the student’s frame of reference and causes him or her to re-examine her or his assumptions. Critically reflecting on underlying assumptions can lead to the transformation of perspective and eventual action based on new perspectives. The primary method of accomplishing this critical reflection is dialogue. Consistent with Mezirow’s transformative learning process is Sandra Beardsall’s naming of the often-painful moments involved in formation as “unmaking” and her identification of the shaping of pastoral identity as “de/re/formation.”

The educator functions as a “facilitator” and “provocateur” in the transformative learning process. As provocateur, the educator “challenges, stimulates and provokes critical thinking.” As facilitator, the educator is a supportive presence who shapes a hospitable space for group learning, fosters healthy group process, encourages student engagement in reflective discourse, draws out new learning through posing good questions, and introduces textual and other resources. As Vogel notes, “The art of teaching is knowing when and how to support and when and how to challenge adult learners.”

The story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) provides a helpful illustration of transformative learning. The disciples on the road have experienced Jesus’ death and rumours of

533 Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 74 (Summer 1997): 11.
his resurrection, events that they cannot comprehend in their present meaning schemes, akin to Mezirow’s “disorienting dilemma.” When Jesus joins them (unrecognized by them), and they share with him their sadness and confusion, he replies: “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have declared!” (Luke 24:25). In this statement Jesus is playing the role of “provocateur.” Jesus, through discourse, assists in broadening their current meaning schemes, making way for the transformation of their perspectives to encompass a larger vision. At table he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Then their eyes are opened, they recognize him, and the transformative learning process is complete. They experience a “shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters their way of being in the world.” This transformation results in action, as transformations characteristically do, and the disciples get up “that same hour” to return to Jerusalem, rejoin their community, and proclaim the good news.

Whether they experience a few disorienting dilemmas or many cumulative smaller shifts in perspective, theological students participate in transformative learning as they transition from congregant to worship leader. They come to perceive the church, worship, and themselves differently, through the lens of what Dykstra calls “pastoral imagination,” “a way of seeing into and interpreting the world which shapes everything a pastor thinks and does.”

Mezirow’s focus is on the process of formation. In contrast, Christopher Brittain is most interested in the content. He asks the question, “Can a theology student be an evil genius?,” reminding us of the importance of knowledge in negotiating practices and habits, and of

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537 O'Sullivan, 11.
concreteness in identifying central practices.\footnote{Ibid., 146, 151.} Therefore, in this study I will also engage Duck’s theological categories of worship as ritual, revelation, response, relationship, and rehearsal;\footnote{Ruth Duck, \textit{Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 7-16.} and the work of Long on the role of the presider as servant and steward of the worship assembly, who can “get in the way” or “open the way” for seeking an encounter with the holy.\footnote{Kimberley Bracken Long, \textit{The Worshipping Body: The Art of Leading Worship} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 8, 10.}

In the preface to the 1932 \textit{Book of Common Order}, the Holy Spirit is said to act in worship through the soul of [humanity], in Jesus Christ, and in the tradition, causing “certain forms of prayers to glow with light and power.”\footnote{The United Church of Canada, \textit{Book of Common Order}, iii.} Rogers’ work on the five-fold actions of the Holy Spirit (resting, befriending, opening,\footnote{I have replaced Rogers term “dilate” with the term “opening” in an attempt to offer a more expansive understanding than Rogers’ gynaecological metaphor, which has roots in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Eugene F. Rogers, \textit{After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).} empowering, and transfiguring), as revealed in the Bible, may prove helpful as I investigate AST alumni’s understandings of worship, presiding, and the process of their formation as worship leaders.

\textbf{Assumptions Operative in the Study}

I bring the following assumptions to my study of formation through participation in chapel worship life. While much more could be said about each of them, they both arise from and inform the theoretical foundation outlined above.

- Students are shaped or formed \textit{somehow} by their participation in worship in their seminary chapel.

- Students have a variety of experiences, both positive and negative, while in their program of study, influenced by a variety of factors including (but not limited to)
personal factors (e.g. comfort in giving and receiving feedback); relational factors (e.g. respecting and trusting the person that is sharing feedback); and organizational factors (e.g. how feedback sharing opportunities are structured).

• Students, faculty, and staff hold varying, and sometimes conflicting, expectations of seminary chapel worship which influence students’ experience of formation.

• Chapel worship is an ideal setting to form students as worship leaders, as it is an opportunity for students to learn techniques, to practice skills, to integrate theory and action, to employ new-found knowledge, and to think deeply about it all.

• The Holy Spirit works within and through and between the students, staff, and faculty to bring about growth and transformation.

IV. Action-in-Ministry Component

The purpose of this research project is address the following questions through the exploration of remembered experiences of alumni attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship while they were students at AST. How does the process of formation for worship leadership unfold? What issues, factors, influences, interventions, strategies, or actions influence this unfolding? What is learned about planning and leading worship, and the identity and spirituality of the worship leader? And what are some ways that the Formation program could be strengthened to be more helpful in the process of formation for worship leadership? Utilizing case study methodology, a three-stage study will be conducted which will include a questionnaire, interviews, and a focus group.

V. Case Study Methodology Operative in the Study

To explore the research question, “In what ways have students’ experiences in AST chapel worship contributed to their formation as worship leaders within the United Church of
Canada?”, I will use the qualitative research methodology of case study. A methodology suited to the evaluation of a program or project’s effectiveness, case study explores issues through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting or a context), over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

This methodology is well-suited to explore the theological school chapel setting’s role in encouraging and discouraging the formation of AST students as worship leaders in the following ways. Firstly, it produces in-depth narrative descriptions of the ordinary lived experiences of several individuals attending, planning, leading, and reflecting on worship within the bounded system of the Wednesday afternoon UCC Formation worship in the AST chapel. It requires detailed contextual analysis and critical reflection on the issues of why and how the phenomenon of formation for worship leadership occurs and what it means for individuals. Case study methodology brings lived experiences into conversation with previous research. It proposes informed and reasoned recommendations for future action. Case study recognizes the complexity of ministerial situations and the multi-layered nature of the process of formation for worship leadership. It also embraces multiple data collection sources, including interviews, questionnaires, field notes, artifacts, focus groups, and observations, which increase the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the case study approach assumes that researcher and

546 Creswell, 74 and Sensing, 141.
547 Creswell, 73.
548 Sensing, 142.
549 Ibid., 141.
550 Ibid., 141.
551 Ibid., 141.
participants are proactive participants in the study. This allowance is important as it recognizes the centrality of my role of Formation Director in the shaping of the current UCC worship ethos at AST, and it utilizes the collaborative approach that I seek to embody in my work with students.

Selection of Respondents

Because of the power differential in our student-Formation Director relationship, it would not be ethically appropriate to invite current students to participate in this study. Therefore, all AST alumni who have participated in the on-campus UCC Formation program and graduated from 2011 to 2014, who are ordained, and are currently worship leaders in UCC congregations will be invited to participate in the first stage of the study, a written questionnaire. This maximum variation sampling will provide the broadest range possible of perspectives on the research topic.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants will be asked if they would be willing to participate in a one-hour interview by phone or in person. Four to six of these volunteers will be invited for an interview. Criteria for choosing this purposive sample include: balancing age, gender, and geographical location; depth of articulation of experience; and diversity of opinion in the questionnaire.

Three of the volunteers will be asked to participate in stage 3 of the study, the focus group. This group will survey the initial data analysis together, further define and explore the process of formation for worship leadership, and propose conclusions or recommendations.

552 Myers, xii.
553 The potential total number of such alumni is nineteen. Focusing on the 2011-14 group will ensure that the participants will have been in ministry long enough to have settled into consistent patterns of worship leadership within a church community, and briefly enough to remember past events experienced at AST.
554 Although the potential students represent communities across Canada and Bermuda, they are racially quite homogenous, with almost all being white.
555 Sensing, 84, 221.
These three will be chosen based on geographical proximity, fair representation of the Formation Group, and representation of different years of study. They will be joined by an experienced AST Formation Director of another denomination, who will provide an outsider’s perspective, and by me.

When the alumni are sent their invitations to participate, detailed information about the scope of the study, its goals, and benefits of participating will be included. Potential respondents will be familiar with qualitative research methods, as each of these former students completed their own qualitative research project in their final year at AST. Also, the invitation will give time for students to recall events that happened one to four years ago. In the unlikely event that seven alumni do not volunteer to be interviewed, invitations will be sent to the previous graduating class until the quota is met.

Data Collection

Sensing recommends that triangulation be utilized in the design of the case study as a key way to maximize credibility. Therefore, this study has been constructed in such a way as to include triangulation of data collection methods; triangulation of perspectives of insider, researcher, outsider; and triangulation of thinking, writing, and speaking. As case study methodology borrows tools from other methodologies, there are many data collection methods available. I have chosen questionnaire, interview, and focus group as best suited to my research question and the circumstances of my participants.

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556 The Formation Director may be more accurately described as an “insider outsider,” as he or she serves or has served at AST as a Formation Director for at least four years. It is my belief that his or her Roman Catholic or Anglican affiliation and lack of participation in the UCC Formation Group will give him or her enough distance to help identify the focus group’s unarticulated assumptions and questions.

557 Sensing, 220.

558 Ibid., 75.

559 Myers, 5.
**Questionnaire**

Once the participants have received their invitation to participate (Appendix B), and have signed the Consent form (Appendix C), a questionnaire will be sent by email (Appendix D). In this questionnaire, participants will be asked to reflect on their understandings of the meaning and purpose of worship, in general and in the UCC in particular, and the role and purpose of the presider. They will be invited to consider their own worship leadership practice and how their participation in UCC Formation worship contributed to their formation as worship leader, focusing on knowledge, skill, identity, and spirituality. The participant is then invited to consider a selection of metaphors for theological school chapel to reveal their expectation of chapel life. The final question considers the authorities the participant consults in planning and leading worship. This question seeks to understand the participant’s degree of commitment to the UCC value of ordered liberty. All these questions are intended to paint the broad strokes of the painting, setting the background for deeper, more detailed reflection in the interview.

This questionnaire provides an opportunity to invite as many students as possible to participate in the study, and a chance for respondents to construct thoughtful responses. It begins with grand tour questions focusing on knowledge and opinion, to reveal participants’ “goals, intentions, desires and values,” setting the stage for the narrower, personal, guided, descriptive, interpretive, and behavioural questions that follow.

**Interview**

Once four to six volunteers have been identified (using the criteria listed above), one-on-one semi-structured interviews of 60 minutes in length, either in person or by phone, will be conducted. As Sensing writes: “Interviews allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not

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560 Sensing, 88.
available to the researcher by observation.\textsuperscript{561} Semi-structured interviews have the advantages of allowing the interviewer to vary the order of the questions, to ask follow-up questions in order to clarify respondents’ meanings, to probe for more detailed responses, and to allow the interviewees to ask their own questions. See Appendix E for a list of proposed questions. Because the data will be analyzed between interviews, the interview questions may change over time, drawing out issues as they arise.

Interviews will be conducted with the following pattern: backward questions, exploring past experiences; inward questions, extrapolating meaning and learning from past experiences; and forward questions, inviting hopes for future programming.\textsuperscript{562} The interview begins with two questions asking for descriptive words. These questions are intended to ease participants into the interview, allow feeling responses, and to create a frame in which to hold the participants’ responses to later questions.

The core of the interview is the consideration of a story or two from the participant’s chapel experience, inquiring specifically about the possible impact of a variety factors on these experiences, in an attempt to create a rich, “thick”\textsuperscript{563} description of the participants’ experiences and an understanding of how formation happens in the chapel setting.

The interview then turns its attention to broader questions of the participant’s current understandings of planning and leading worship, because whom we are forming students into is also important. The interviewee is invited to share metaphors for their worship leadership, as metaphors simplify, clarify, and summarize self-understanding.\textsuperscript{564} One question considers those influences other than chapel worship that have influenced their development into the worship

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{561} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{562} Sensing, 108.
\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 195. “Thick description” is a term coined by Clifford Geertz in \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures} (New York, NY: Basic, 1973).
\textsuperscript{564} Ibid., 167.
\end{flushright}
leader they are now, in order to determine chapel’s influence within the larger scheme. Finally, looking toward recommendations for the future, the participant is asked what three wishes or hopes they have for UCC Formation worship.

The interviews will be scheduled one per week. They will be recorded, with the participant’s consent, and stored on two encrypted data sticks. Participants will be given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Within two to three weeks of the interview, participants will be given a transcript of their interview for review, clarification, and further reflection on emerging themes, as well as to reflect on any discoveries they made through their participation in the study. This written respondent validation increases the trustworthiness of the study and provides opportunity for interviewees to participate in the early stages of data analysis.

Field notes will be kept for each interview, noting any interviewee body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, attitudes or moods, significant terms or phrases, as well as my own feelings, reactions, insights, and interpretations. Field notes are the most efficient way to gather data from the researcher’s perspective.565 These field notes will be analyzed in order to facilitate interpretation of the research data, make any necessary changes to the interview/focus group protocol, and identify questions to follow up on. Keeping field notes will also assist in reflexivity,566 the open acknowledgement of the central role I play both in the research process and the program under study.

Focus Group

The third stage of the data collection triangle is the focus group. After all the interviews and member checks are complete, a group of three alumni, an experienced non-UCC Formation Director, and I will meet to review the data and continue the process of analysis and

565 Ibid., 180.
566 Ibid., 76
interpretation. According to Sensing, the focus group is an opportunity for another set of eyes to see deeper meanings in the data and to creatively synthesize the data in a holistic fashion. The focus group guide can be found at Appendix F. During this meeting, the alumni members will be given an opportunity to respond to the questionnaire and interview results, to notice any silences in the data, to depict the process of formation, and to formulate recommendations. The guest Formation Director will then be invited to identify any assumptions, clarifications, missing information, or emerging questions. Time will then be allowed for the alumni to elaborate or address what the guest Formation Director identified. The focus group will conclude with a question about what the participants might have learned about themselves and their formation through their participation in the research project.

Data Analysis

In order to “place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine it in a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate the interpretation to others,” the following steps will be taken:

Step 1: Read and reread the accumulated text, highlighting key words and phrases.

Step 2: Organize repeated issues, patterns, and themes, including acts, values, and attitudes.

Step 3: Identify “slippage,” that is, contradictions or divergence of data.

Step 4: Identify silences, that is, what has been left unsaid because, for example, it was considered self-evident or unacceptable.

Step 5: Create a “thick” description of the phenomenon of formation for worship leadership.

What was done (act)? When or where was it done (scene)? Who did it (agent)? How did he or

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567 See Appendix F for focus group questions.
568 Sensing, 181, 197.
569 Ibid., 194.
570 This plan is an adaptation from Sensing, 148 and 197.
571 Both Internal Homogeneity (the extent to which data holds together in a certain category) and External Heterogeneity (the extent to which the differences between the categories are distinct) will be noted. Ibid., 197.
she do it (agency)? What was the reaction or emotional response (impact)? Why was it done (purpose)?

Step 6: Create a chart that establishes relationships of people, events, institutions, or decisions presented in the case, including those who have differing information, power, or objectives.

Step 7: Consider the theoretical and theological resources that would help in clarifying the issues in the case.

Step 8: Draw conclusions regarding my own role as researcher and Formation Director and consider recommendations for program changes.

*Ethics Review for Research with Human Subjects*

As stated earlier, the study participants will be recently ordained UCC graduates of AST. No formal power differential remains between the study participants and me for we are now colleagues in ordained ministry. However, a perceived power differential may still remain for the student if they have not yet made the shift in perspective to consider me their colleague, especially since we will be reflecting on their past experiences when I was their Formation Director and there was a power differential between us. My intention in giving the participants choices (to fill in a questionnaire only or to participate in the interview by phone or in person) is that they might have options that suit their comfort levels.

Each participant will sign a consent form that will outline the purpose of the project; describe the methods of data gathering (i.e. questionnaire, interview, transcript review, and focus group); ensure anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process with the use of a pseudonym and the removal of any personal identifying information; assure the participant of the secure storage of all data gathered; and inform the participant he or she is free not to answer any question, or end his or her participation in the study at any time (Appendix C.) All
electronic data, including written questionnaires, recordings of interviews, transcripts, and field notes, will be stored on two encrypted data sticks. The data sticks and any paper documents will be stored in a locked metal firebox. All research data will be destroyed upon the successful defence of the thesis.

The study will proceed only with the consent of the University of Toronto Research Ethics Review Board. The application will be forwarded to the DMin Director for submission following the acceptance of the thesis proposal.

VI. Risks and Limitations of the Study

The risk level for this research project is low. I anticipate no negative social repercussions for the participants. However, there is a small chance that the participants may feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or upset. As I have a prior relationship with the participants, they may feel mild embarrassment if they anticipate that their answers may hurt my feelings. I will do my best to create a space of open and honest critical reflection, including modelling my own open and honest self-reflection. More importantly, theological school can be a painful time for some students. If emotional upset does occur in the interview, an offer will be made to connect the participant with a neutral support person who will be available to them by telephone to offer pastoral care. There is also a slight chance that if a participant is currently struggling in his or her ministry, it may negatively affect their recollection of their theological school experience.

Because of my role in the program under evaluation, there is also a risk that I may cloud the interview with my own needs, fears, and beliefs in such a way that prevents me from hearing the message of the interviewee clearly or prevents the interviewee from responding honestly. The research project is designed to reduce this risk through the incorporation of a written
questionnaire, review of transcripts, researcher field notes, and observation of an outside expert, a non-UCC Formation Director.

Although it is anticipated that the findings will be applicable to current United Church students at AST, the study may be limited in its applicability to other theological school contexts as each school has its own practices around student participation in chapel worship. Care will also have to be taken in making claims concerning causal factors for formation for worship leadership. Any such claims will have to be tentatively asserted.572

VII. Contributions of the Study

It is my hope that this study will contribute to future conversations about processes of formation at AST, resulting in a more effective learning community overall; that new learnings from the study will make a positive contribution to chapel worship at AST, enriching the community’s worship life as well as strengthening students’ knowledge, skills, identity, and spirituality as worship leaders; and that this study will equip me to serve more effectively as UCC Formation Director. This study may also be of some value to the faculty and staff responsible for chapel worship in other theological schools. Finally, adding stories from the perspective of theological students’ experience, especially in the Canadian context, to the scholarship on formation for ministry and theological school chapel worship will strengthen these fields of academic inquiry.

[The Bibliography and Appendices of this proposal have not been included as more detailed versions have been attached to the thesis above.]

572 Sensing, 218.